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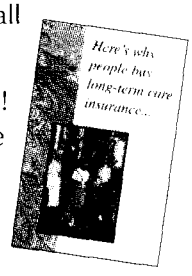

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**Guide to Long-Term Care Insurance, Health Insurance Association of America, 1996.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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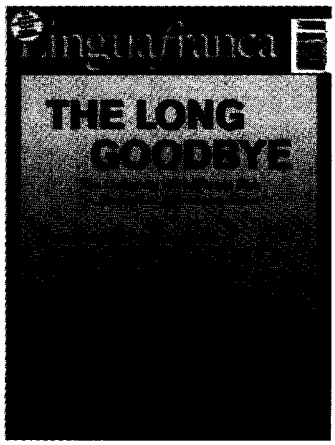
AFFIRMATIVE REACTION

The title of Pamela Burdman's essay on the University of California and affirmative action, "The Long Goodbye" [*LF*, June/July], implies that UC is abandoning a long-standing policy. It isn't. I have taught at UC-San Diego for more than twenty-four years and can tell you that, in contrast to the tone of many comments by faculty and regents in that article, affirmative action was never practiced in large parts of the university. Faculty recruitment throughout the Seventies and into the mid-Eighties on this campus regularly ignored affirmative action rules, and administrators went along in the name of hiring faculty of "distinction." The total pool of African-American and Mexican-American faculty at UC-San Diego is no larger, and may actually be smaller by one or two members, than it was when I arrived in 1973.



The same can be said about affirmative action and student recruitment. It was done haphazardly during the Seventies and early Eighties when it was done at all. I recall one scandal on campus in the late Seventies, when the federal government discovered that funds for recruiting minority graduate students had been used to fund UC's overall recruiting budget.

Time has passed, and so everyone has forgotten that affirmative action was a conservative Sixties solution to the pervasive legacy of racism in our nation. Liberals accepted it rather than rewrite all work rules and all admission standards—tasks that, among other things, would have abolished job seniority (maybe even tenure?) had the Civil Rights Act of 1964 been rigorously enforced. Now, we have the worst of both worlds. Racism is still an everyday fact, but we are told that affirmative action is no longer necessary. UC will enter the twenty-first century just as it did the twentieth, indifferent to the real social consequences of racism and perpetuating the advantages of the already privileged. The Sixties will have to be fought all over again.

MICHAEL MONTEON
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UC-SAN DIEGO

Pamela Burdman writes that SP-2, the UC regents' resolution barring the use of race and sex as criteria in employment and contracting, has had "little impact" because it is "largely overridden by federal affirmative action statutes."

The claim that unidentified federal affirmative action statutes override the regents' policy is puzzling. It is clear from SP-2 that the use of racial and sexual criteria is permitted only if their use is "strictly necessary" to secure or maintain eligibility for federal funds. But as the general counsel to the university has pointed out, there appear to be no federal requirements that race or gender be used as "positive factors in employment selection practices." The general counsel has also advised UC's president, Richard Atkinson, that "race [and] gender should not be a factor" in any university program. Unless and until federal agencies issue explicit directives to the university to the contrary, SP-2's prohibition against the use of race or sex as a criterion in hiring and contracting practices remains in full force.

Burdman also writes that the regents' vote revealed that a large number of faculty members had grown "strongly impa-

continued on page 62

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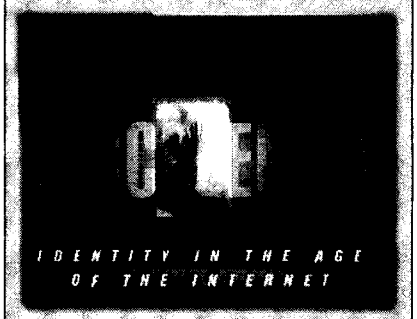

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Field *Notes*

SILENT TREATMENT

BACK IN THE TWENTIES, Whitman scholar Emory Holloway made a jolting discovery. While researching Whitman's erotic ode "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City," Holloway lit on an amended first draft—clearly addressed to a man. Puzzled and shaken, Holloway published his findings. Several years later, however, in his Pulitzer Prize–winning biography, he ignored his own research, reporting instead that the rumors of Whitman's romance with a New Orleans woman in 1848 were "substantially true."

Biographer's amnesia? If so, something similar may be afoot at the Walt Whitman Birthplace Museum in Huntington, Long Island, according to the Calamus Preservation Society, a squad of gay activists and academics named after the famously phallic plant Whitman chose as his totem. This past May, Calamus members protested the dedication ceremony for the museum's new Whitman Interpretive Center. Whitman, they complained, had been "de-gayed" for the state-funded exhibit, all evidence of his erotic attachment to men leeched out in favor of a school-field-trip-friendly portrait of the artist as a sexless old bard.

The protest erupted moments before a planned lecture by Hofstra University professor Joann Krieg, the academic adviser for the exhibit. Calamus activist David Robinson blocked a guard while Arnie Kantrowitz, an associate professor of English at CUNY-Staten Island, seized the microphone. "I'm a professor, too," announced Kantrowitz. "Walt Whitman's homosexuality was crucial to understanding his vision of democracy, his spirituality! Walt Whitman was gay!" At that point, the mike was cut off, and Kantrowitz was escorted offstage. Robinson then tossed blackboard erasers into the air to symbolize the exhibit's effacement of history.

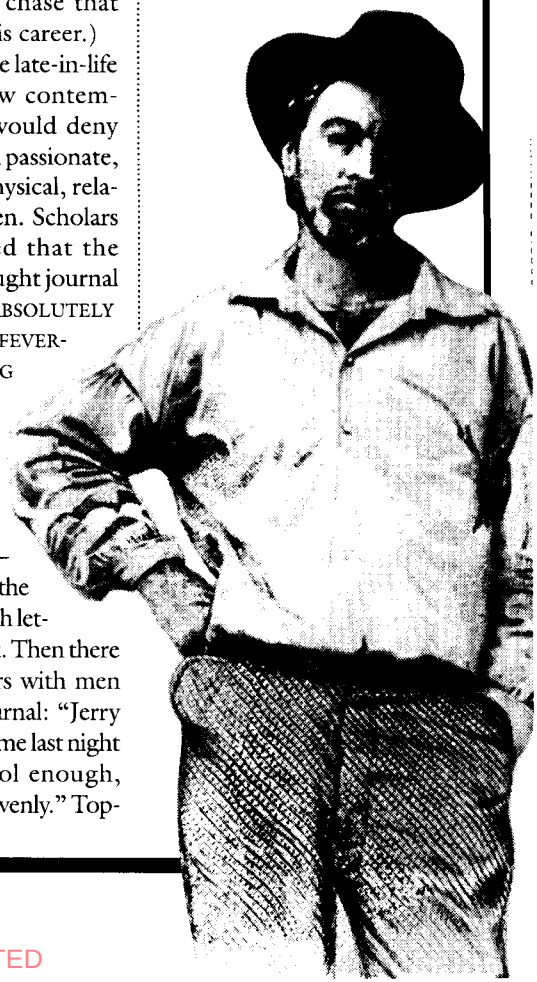
One of the erasers hit Joann Krieg. (It was "unseemly behavior," she says, noting that the eraser was a "good-sized thing.") Krieg, who herself presumes Whitman was homosexual, terms the protest "just silly." The exhibit, she says, properly focuses on Whitman's work, not life. She adds: "There is no factual information that deals with a person's sexual behavior. It's not stamped on his birth certificate."

"Where's the evidence that I sleep with my husband?" retorts Betsy Erkkila, co-editor of the gay-themed Whitman anthology *Breaking Bounds* (Oxford). "It's only when you're talking about gay people that anyone demands this kind of evidence. You can't separate the poetry from the politics and the sexuality."

The debate is certainly nothing new. Back in Whitman's time, admiring gay readers like John Addington Symonds and Bram Stoker wrote the aging poet probing letters, seeking to gauge the level at which he intended his rhetoric about "the love of comrades" to be taken literally. Whitman stonewalled; and in one famous instance, he wrote Symonds to deny that the Calamus poems concerned sexual feelings between men—and to brag that he'd fathered six children, a statement now universally believed to be a lie. (It was a lie that sent an unhinged Emory Holloway on a wild-goose chase that almost derailed his career.)

But despite these late-in-life protestations, few contemporary scholars would deny that Whitman had passionate, and most likely physical, relationships with men. Scholars have long agreed that the "16.4" of a distraught journal entry ("GIVE UP ABSOLUTELY & for good...this FEVERISH, FLUCTUATING useless UNDIGNIFIED PURSUIT of 16.4") was code for Peter Doyle, Whitman's long-time companion—P and D indicating the sixteenth and fourth letters of the alphabet. Then there are the encounters with men detailed in his journal: "Jerry Taylor...slept with me last night weather soft, cool enough, warm enough, heavenly." Topping it off is the lovelorn Calamus sequence, which Whitman edited radically over the course of his life, removing its most homoerotic content. Indeed, for many in the gay community, the question is all but settled. Allen Ginsberg, for one, famously commented that he had "slept with the man who slept with the man who slept with Whitman."

None of this information (or lore) is included in the Huntington exhibit. Rather, there is a section titled "Whitman's Life of Love," featuring pictures of two people: Anne Gilchrist, who developed a massive crush on Whitman after reading his work—and moved, despite his discouragements, to be near him;



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and Peter Doyle, who is labeled Walt's "close friend." The placard contains the elliptical remark, "He promoted for public consumption and for posterity a presumed heterosexuality." Well, yes, but it does beg the question: Who assumed otherwise?

"That seems like an awfully modest acknowledgment," dryly comments Ed Folsom, editor of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*. While Folsom says Whitman was gay, others aren't so sure the poet's sexuality can be readily described in contemporary terms. For example, David Reynolds, author of *Walt Whitman's America* (Vintage), prefers the word "omnisexual" to describe Whitman's orientation and argues that current definitions of queer identity hardly jibe with late-nineteenth-century same-sex relationships. On the other hand, critics like Gary Schmidgall, author of the new *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* (Dutton), further an overtly queer agenda. Schmidgall not only details copious evidence of the poet's homosexuality, such as amorous letters written to men, but draws parallels to contemporary gay life—comparing, for example, Whitman's Civil War nursing experiences with the AIDS crisis. (Schmidgall also sings and celebrates himself, nostalgically recalling Whitmanesque May/December affairs and positively comparing himself with the poet in the looks department: "My blond hair, unlike Walt's, has so far not turned gray.")

So why did the museum skirt the gay issue? Was it simply a somewhat ill-conceived intellectual judgment call? Some suggest a curatorial failure of nerve. Jim O'Grady, a New York journalist, claims to have copies of leaked memos that show materials were deliberately revised to eliminate gay content. (Repeated calls to the Interpretive Center were unreturned; Brian Vattimo, a State Parks Commission spokesman, says that he knows of "no pressure and no memos" after "extensive conversations" with people involved in the project.) Certainly, as a state-funded historical site, the Interpretive Center might be in a risky position if it were dedicated to a lusty, wharf-cruising boy-loving "top man," as Schmidgall's portrayal suggests. Did the center duck the issue to preserve its funding?

So why did the museum skirt the gay issue? Some suggest a curatorial failure of nerve.

It wouldn't be the first time this sort of thing has happened. A few years back, the Alice Austen House Museum in Staten Island, a city-funded historical site dedicated to a pioneering turn-of-the-century woman photographer, faced a similar protest when its board of directors shunned a graduate student who had outed their local heroine. In response, the New York Lesbian Avengers staged a protest at the museum's Nautical Festival: Dressed as old-fashioned lifeguards, they hopped on to the Staten Island Ferry carrying inner tubes labeled "dyke preserver" and singing lesbian-themed sea chanteys. Despite the resulting publicity, the institution refused to alter the exhibit. The current tour guide there describes Gertrude Tate, Austen's longtime lover, as "Alice's very close friend."

Guides at the Whitman exhibit have been advised to take much the same approach, informing curious visitors that the Interpretive Center "does not take a position" on Whitman's sexuality. But even if the museum is wary of taking a stand, other mainstream voices aren't so reticent. A recent episode of the family-friendly frontier drama *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* featured an out-and-proud Whitman who faces down (admittedly anachronistic) taunts of "nancy boy" during a poetry reading. Who knows? Where CBS dares to tread, others may follow.

EMILY NUSSBAUM

PLAYING FIELD

WHILE TEACHING AT THE University of Nairobi in the early Eighties, mathematician Vernon Eagle found himself taking unscheduled vacations: Periodically, when student demonstrators became too vocal, government troops would shut down the campus for perhaps a week at a time. So Eagle spent his time off exploring the coast of Kenya, where he chanced to learn a Swahili form of mancala, a game in which players distribute seeds or stones into indentations on a piece of shaped wood.

Elsewhere in Africa, Eagle found different forms of mancala. He noticed that some societies used simpler rules and saw the game as a way to socialize, while others played it competitively, using a version that required computational abilities comparable to chess. Nevertheless, one variable never changed: People separated by language, culture, and hundreds of miles played mancala with precisely the same method of spreading seeds. "Something just clicked," says Eagle. "Now that I knew there were lots of different ways to play, I wondered about how that one game could have spread across an entire continent."

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Eagle read everything he could find on mancala. On a 1992 visit to southwestern China, he decided to investigate local board game practices. He made a few inquiries and was directed to the remote Lijiang Prefecture. There, he found elderly villagers who described mancala-like games they had played as children. The distinctive seed-spreading technique of these games raised an obvious question: How did people thousands of miles away from one another wind up with such similar games?

Until recently, academics asking such questions about board games have lacked a specialized journal in which to present their work. But no longer: This month marks the official debut of *Board Games Research*, to be published yearly by the International Institute of Asian Studies in the Netherlands. Founded by Dutch psychologist Alexander de Voogt, the journal's first number will reflect a range of original fieldwork, including Eagle's refinements of mancala taxonomy as well as intriguing evidence that the Incas developed dice long before they made contact with Europeans in the sixteenth century.

As the topics of the journal's articles suggest, board game scholarship is not simply the latest fad in cultural studies. In some ways, Eagle and his colleagues resemble museum curators, collecting and preserving aspects of cultures that are changing or disappearing under Western influence. The ancient Indian game pachisi, for example, was brought to England around 1880, trademarked, and then marketed the world over—eventually back in India. According to Irving Finkel, a specialist in East Asian antiquities at the British Museum and contributor to the first issue of *Board Games Research*, Parcheesi is "merely a watered-down version of the Indian game, which is played with lots of different variations and can really get quite complicated." Recently, Finkel convinced field-workers for the Indian government's anthropological survey to make notations about local versions of the game. The results are still coming in, but

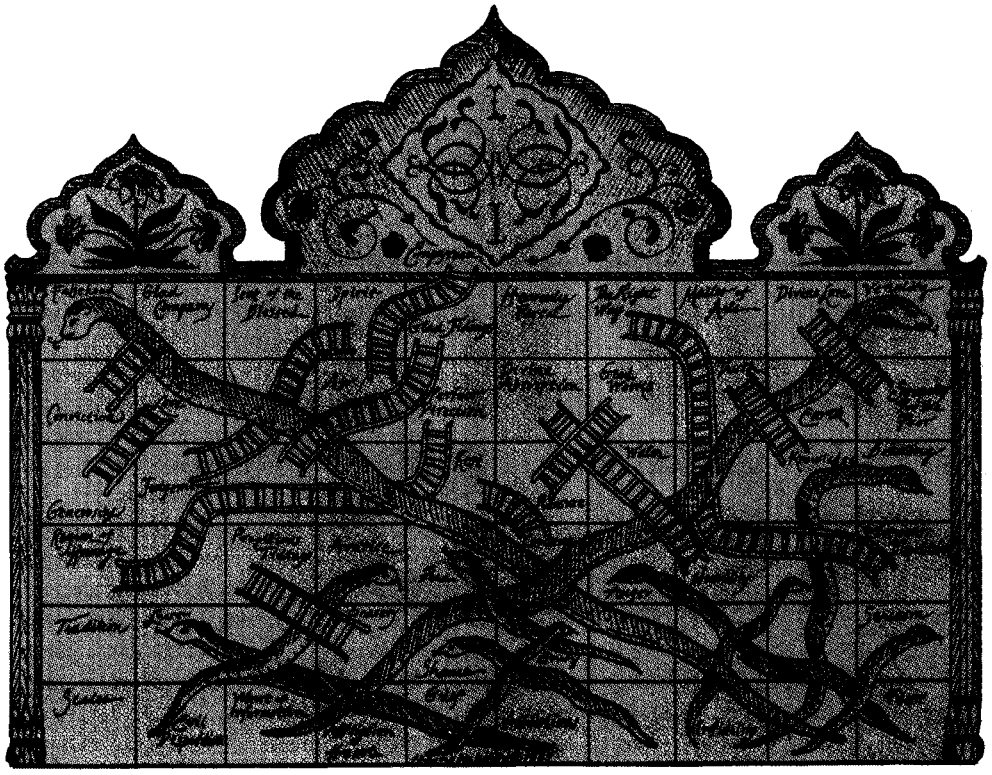
Board games and their rules may provide a link to people and places otherwise inaccessible.

Finkel expects a treasure trove of information on the board game's historic roots.

India is also ground zero for chess, easily the board game that has received the most scholarly attention. The first synthesis of chess history was H.J.R. Murray's 900-page *History of Chess* (1913), followed in 1952 by his *History of Board Games Other Than Chess*. Both remain standard works in the field. The son of the original *OED* editor, Murray was among the first to hypothesize that games traveled across cultures and that most existing board games could be traced to a small number of ancestors. This is more or less the belief of many in the field today: Just as paleobiologists analyze similarities among fossils for clues to animal evolution, board game specialists attempt a taxonomy of their own, based on features such as the shape of the board, the way pieces move, and how one piece may capture another.

Borrowing a page from the cladistics primer, Eagle speculates that the Chinese mancala games he observed belong to a monophyletic group of games that evolved from a single, archaic mancala. (Where *that* game first appeared, though, is still up in the air. Though an African origin seems likely, work on mancala in Asia has only just begun.) Yet there are also many games that share similarities but are *not* related—the board game equivalent of what biologists call convergent evolution.

The ramifications of such game theories, scholars insist, are significant: Like language, the dispersion of board games across cultures is proof of an intellectual exchange that may correspond historically to other kinds of contact, like trade, warfare, or—as our knowledge of the spread of chess from India to Europe during the Middle Ages indicates—the hobnobbing of the upper classes. On the other hand, Finkel explains, "games can flow from culture to culture at a very low level, rather as if you were to take a bottle of milk and drop it on the kitchen floor. They exist on a fundamental level that can't be stopped, because they can seem trivial, such an incidental part of daily life.... Even if you and I speak different languages, I might be able to learn your game in an hour. I *won't* be able to learn your language in an hour."



MARTIE HOLMER

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Moreover, board games and their rules may provide a link to people and places otherwise inaccessible. Sociologist Elliott Avedon at Ontario's University of Waterloo thinks of board games as artifacts "frozen in time," as "encapsulated social systems, just loaded with symbols particular to a time and culture and that time and culture's behavior and logic." In other words, as long as you've got the board, the pieces, and the rules, you can approximate an intellectual situation that occurred, say, in Mesopotamia in the second millennium B.C.

Then again, the full cultural significance of the game's symbols may not translate over time and place. Long before it became known as Chutes and Ladders, the ancient Indian game Snakes and Ladders carried a clear-cut moral lesson: Each square represented a different character trait (arrogance, for example) that could set you back a level or propel you closer to Nirvana, the final square.

The erosion of religious aspects of board games may seem to parallel the withering popularity of many games themselves. Researchers note that some "species," supplanted by television and video games, face extinction. But in general, as long as there remains a healthy biodiversity, scholars aren't sentimental about the loss of a few versions of a game. "Look, it's sad when a species dies," says Eagle. "But what would be worse is if an entire language died—there would never be a poem written in that language again. It's not worth it to get nostalgic."

ALLISON XANTHA MILLER

SHELL GAME

IN "THE LOVE SONG OF J. Alfred Prufrock," the young T.S. Eliot famously wrote: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." But do these claws belong to a lobster or a crab? Or neither?

This spring, a long overdue literary debate on this question finally took place. In his recent, heavily annotated edition of Eliot juvenilia, *Inventions of the March Hare* (Harcourt Brace), Boston University English professor Christopher Ricks opted

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for the crab reading. But Richard Poirier begged to differ. Reviewing Ricks's volume in *The New Republic,* the eminent literary critic (and New England native) noted that "crabs are endowed only with rudimentary claws, when they have them at all," and concluded that "these are most likely the claws specifically of a Maine lobster." He also took issue with the relevance and chronology of Ricks's annotations.

Ricks was not about to let Poirier's challenge go unanswered. "Like many other people," he replied in a letter to *TNR,* "I find 'scuttling' to be particularly evocative of a crab—lobsters don't much go in for scuttling." More pointedly, he accused Poirier of "willingly ignoring or distorting the plain evidence that plenty of readers before me here have seen a crab in their mind's eye."

Clearly, the matter needs further clarification. Accordingly, *Lingua Franca* asked a number of critics and scholars for their thoughts.

Louis Menand, professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center: "Definitely lobster. The correct association is with the following sentence in the chapter on Gérard de Nerval in Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), Eliot's introduction to the French poets: 'One day, he was found in the Palais-Royal, leading a lobster at the end of a blue ribbon (because, he said, it does not bark, and knows the secrets of the sea).' (This was too bizarre even for the French: Nerval was promptly institutionalized.)

"The famous black melancholy of Nerval was one of the moods Eliot clearly set out to reproduce in his poem, for he ends it with an extended riff on a line from Nerval's sonnet 'El Desdichado' (1854): 'J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la sirène....' (Eliot appropriated another line outright from the same poem ten years later for the cadenza in *The Waste Land:* 'Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie.') The romantic identification in Symons's anecdote of the poet with the lobster—the creature from another element being paraded unhappily about on a leash—must have been too delicious for Eliot not to try to work into his poem.

"Crab claws are too prehensile anyway for the sexual misery 'Prufrock' means to evoke and not nearly funny enough. Lobster claws (and note that Eliot names only claws: do not synecdochize him too quickly!) are a witty variation on Tennyson's super-eroticized hands in *In Memoriam:* swollen with longing but clumsy and vaguely mutant, desiring but undesired. Why would we want to give all these associations up for an everyday trope like a crab?"

Claude Rawson, professor of English at Yale University: "I think it's almost certain that Eliot was thinking of a crab. After all, the poem invokes Prince Hamlet, who once spun a crab metaphor of his own: 'For you yourself, sir, should be as old as I am—if, like a crab, you could go backward.' Furthermore, the crab is so much a twentieth-century image of self-disgust: It's the animal in Sartre's *La Nausée* and a kind of emotional lingua franca for a certain sense of horror and self-abasement. If you look at the twentieth-century imagination, crabs are what comes to mind."

Marjorie Perloff, professor of English at Stanford University: "I've always thought it was a crab: I think there Ricks is right. This debate is a symptom of the fight over Eliot between the British and the Americans. I'm usually on the American side because the British have a strange way of neglecting the American. But lobsters don't scuttle across the floors of silent seas do they? I'm very bad on crustaceans."

Nicholas Jenkins, assistant professor of English at Harvard University: "It's always good to see poetry inspiring passion, even if the passion here seems as much for the academic equivalent of arm wrestling or distance spitting as literary hermeneutics. In other circumstances, I feel sure that these two wonderful and athletic readers would clasp hands and agree that poetic language doesn't really operate at this literalistic level and that the fascination of these lines by Eliot has to do with the linguistic energies contained in words like 'ragged' and 'scuttling,' with the question of why 'across' here is infinitely richer than 'on' or 'over' would have been, with the relation of 'claws' to Prufrock's evident sexual obsession with fingers, sleeves, and arms and to Eliot's own lifelong obsession with drowning and the unknowable nature of the undersea world. In some ways, it's extremely important for the reader to be capable, in Keats's phrase, of 'being in uncertainties...without reaching after fact,' of *not* getting distracted, of *not* bothering with what mysterious submarine creature it is exactly or even to think that one can, or ought, to say, Is it a crab? Or a lobster? I'd call that a red herring."

Helen Vendler, University Professor at Harvard University: "It isn't either. You're not supposed to envision an animal, you're supposed to envision a scuttle. Poets don't give you more than you need to use to understand the feeling they want to convey."

DEPRECIATE THIS!

SINCE THE DAWN OF THE Republic, Congress and the White House have been disagreeing over how to apportion the federal government's resources for the upcoming fiscal year. Never was the process more acrimonious, though, than in the summer of 1994—the unhappy time when both branches fiercely disputed the technical definition of a "budget cut."

One group that could have anticipated all the unpleasantness was the critical accounting scholars—academia's proponents of the notion that how you count your wealth can be more interesting, and troublesome, than wealth itself. Yes: the radical accountants. The existence of a lively substratum of radicals in accounting departments may come as a surprise to academicians unaware that there *are* accounting departments. But the story of accounting's crits—and their work—is well

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worth the attention of anyone curious about the method and madness of "late capital."

The origin of the academic discipline of accounting is mundane enough. In the Sixties and Seventies—a golden age of professionalization—accounting firms developed a new taste for hiring undergraduate accounting majors. At the time, those accounting majors' teachers were drawn mainly from the ranks of practitioners. But the boom in accounting enrollments naturally gave rise to a demand for credentialed instructors and then to the Ph.D. in accounting. Journals of accounting research were established to accommodate the new degree holders' tenure ambitions. And a scholarly discipline was born.

When it came time to train the second generation of Ph.D.s, though, a battle raged over the field's identity: Are accountants more like lawyers or businessmen? Is their primary concern the trustworthy provision of a service or the maximization of profit?

> The humble bookkeeper strides like a colossus through the pages of *Critical Perspectives of Accounting.*

This battle for the soul of accounting research was intimately intertwined with the evolution of the accounting profession itself. Accountants have been around since merchants scratched on tablets, of course. But the profession acquired its modern form in the mid-Thirties, thanks to the passage of the Securities and Exchange Acts. Endeavoring to exorcize the demons that produced the Great Crash, the acts required all publicly traded companies to produce annual financial reports adhering to "generally accepted accounting procedures." This legislation gave accountants a role that is undeniably economic: They "reduce the cost of capital," as the jargon goes, by providing free information that is useful to parties entering into contracts. How this market-driven process works is the subject of the first generation of accounting journals—*The Journal of Accounting Research,* which is published at the University of Chicago, and the American Accounting Association's *Accounting Review.*

CORBIS-BETTMANN

But the Securities and Exchange Acts also elevated the *cultural* role of accountants: They are the artisanal embodiment of trust, the people responsible for imposing an apparently rational, sober imprimatur onto a chaotic economic world. (A large part of many accountants' workweek, after all, is taken up with such occult enterprises as forecasting the future depreciation of a firm's buildings and machinery.) This is where the

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crits come to town, armed with citations from Foucault and Marx, arguing that accountants are not referees in neutral contests but agents of power.

The humble bookkeeper strides like a colossus through the anarchic corridors of capital in the pages of *Critical Perspectives of Accounting*. Founded in 1990, *CPA* is the premier journal of the radical tendency. In its articles, mysteries such as the "total quality" and "just-in-time" revolutions in manufacturing, the new "flexibility" in industrial relations, and the privatization movement are afforded the thickest of descriptions, and you recognize many of the innovations of contemporary capitalism for what they are: revolutions in accounting practices. A 1996 article by Robin Roslender, a professor of accounting at the University of Stirling in Britain, for example, examines brave new accounting techniques like "activity-based costing" and "continuous performance improvement." According to Roslender, accountants aren't mere tabulators. Once they start to introduce factors into their work like customer satisfaction, skill satisfaction, and employee involvement, their work begins to look more and more like that of sociologists.

Tony Tinker, the co-editor of *CPA*, would rather see the bean counters live up to an even higher calling than sociology: revolution. As both a Marxist romantic of the old school and a certified public accountant who teaches at New York City's Baruch College, he believes accountants have nothing to lose but their irrelevance. With the business world asking them to become more concerned with assessing quality instead of quantity, accountants need to understand that they are particularly well placed to bend this new regime to humane ends. (Or, as Roslender puts it, "to attract the lower levels of managerial and professional employees to the cause of genuine bottom-up empowerment.") First item on Tinker's agenda: "Accountants need to break free of this rigid vocabulary by which they both see and apprehend the world."

Which explains the poetry. A few years back, Tinker and co-editor David Cooper began accepting verse for what was otherwise a rather staid journal of social science. "We thought that this would be a way in which academics who like dealing with words could release their forms of alienation," Tinker explains. To his surprise, he found "a hell of a lot of practitioners who are secretly scribbling away on the side." His effort not just to understand accountants but to change them began to seem a bit less quixotic.

CPA publishes about a dozen poems in each issue; half the contributors are garden-variety bookkeepers yearning to breathe free. And a preponderance of the poetic evidence (Goodman, 1997; Kitchen, 1996; White, 1997a, 1997b; Weimat, 1996) suggests that lonely utopians could certainly do worse than to search for company among the world's accountants. Characteristically plaintive is the following verse from the February/March 1997 issue:

> Stop signing those checks
> and listen to the lilacs bloom
> listen to the rush hour
> listen listen
> listen to time die.
> Yes, I know.
> Yes. Yes.
> I understand.

RICK PERLSTEIN

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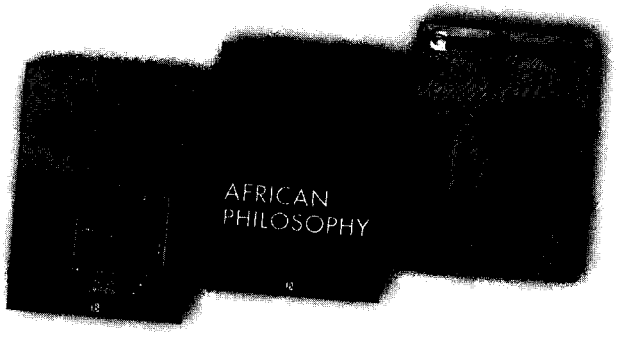

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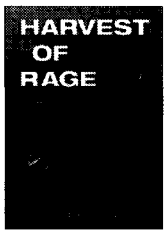

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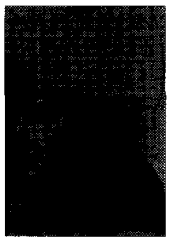

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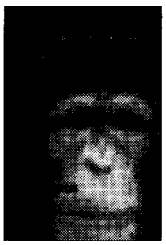

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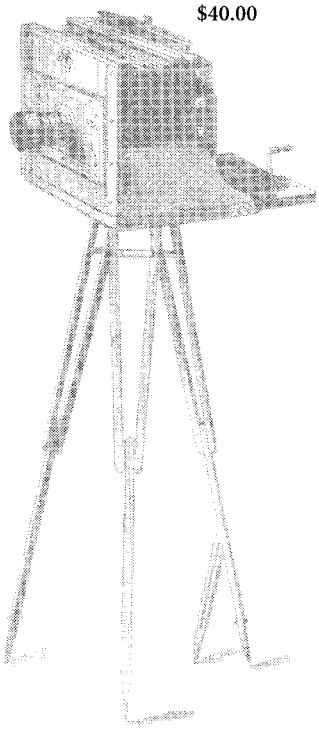

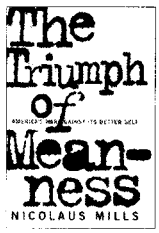

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Breakthrough *Books*

AS THE WORLD FOCUSES ON CHINA AND ITS FUTURE, WE ASKED EIGHT SCHOLARS TO RECOMMEND THEIR FAVORITE RECENT BOOKS ON CHINA'S PAST.

Orville Schell, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley and author of nine books on China, including *Mandate of Heaven* (Touchstone, 1995).

"Perhaps the best way to understand contemporary China is to read an author who never wrote a word on it: **Primo Levi**. In books like ***The Drowned and the Saved*** (Vintage, 1989) and ***The Reawakening*** (Touchstone, 1995), Levi writes about the difficult necessity of remembering the past, of memorializing the past, of continuing to reflect on the past. The Chinese, however, are currently gripped by a numbing bout of historical amnesia. There is an expression commonly used whenever anyone mentions the past: *Bie shuole!* which roughly translates, 'Let's just not talk about it.' To understand this deficit of attention to memory, one might well read ***Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*** (Free Press, 1997), by **Jasper Becker**. Becker reconstructs in agonizing detail the famine during the early Sixties in which twenty to thirty million people died—a famine that the world didn't hear about for several decades. In illuminating this vital episode in China's brutal revolutionary period, Becker helps us understand how hard it can be for a people to reckon with a past so filled with self-destructiveness."

....

Merle Goldman, professor of Chinese history at Boston University and author of *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Harvard, 1994).

"There is no more pleasurable and accessible way to learn about the tumultuous and revolutionary events in China's twentieth-century history than to read ***Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*** (Anchor, 1992), by **Jung Chang**. It is a compelling memoir of three generations of Chinese women: the grandmother, a concubine, who lived through the warlord period of the Twenties and Thirties; the mother, who grew up during the Sino-Japanese war and helped to bring the communists to power in 1949; and the daughter, the author, who grew up in the era of Mao Zedong and became a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The author's parents, who were true believers in the revolution, endured humiliation and torture, and her father became insane. Unlike her grandmother and parents, whose fates were determined by events beyond their control, the author, at the close of the century, has been able to determine her own life. It is a family saga that vividly evokes China's twentieth-century history."

....

Roderick MacFarquhar, professor of history and political science at Harvard University and author most recently of *The Coming of the Cataclysm* (Columbia, 1997), volume 3 of *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*.

"***Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*** (Princeton, 1995), by **Alastair Iain Johnston**, is a radical reinterpretation of Chinese attitudes toward warfare. It contends that the Chinese are no less concerned with the use of military power than any other civilization—a point that scholars have traditionally disputed because, as Johnston demonstrates, they misread the Chinese classics." For a sense of the contemporary ramifications of these arguments, MacFarquhar recommends ***Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*** (M.E. Sharpe, 1992–2000), a series of translations of and commentaries on Mao's complete works, edited by **Stuart Schram**. "The fourth volume of a projected ten is currently in press. As a compendium of the basic ideas that led to revolution in China, it should appeal not just to the specialist reader but to anyone with an interest in the Third World and in revolution—indeed, to anyone interested in twentieth-century history itself."

....

E. Bruce Brooks, research professor of Chinese at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and co-author of *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (Columbia, 1997). Brooks recommends what he calls "a breakthrough tool": **The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series** (Commercial Press of Hong Kong, 1992–), a concordance of the standard texts of classical China complied under the supervision of **D.C. Lau** of Hong Kong University. "The concordances superintended by William Hung in the Thirties gave scholars access to a limited inventory of texts. The Lau project, sixty years later, builds on that foundation and will eventually include ninety-three titles in both conventional and electronic format. If I were limited to a week with one book, I would spend it with one of these—perhaps the writings of the school of Mencius, with their arresting focus on human rights issues, or one of the classic military treatises—not to learn what someone else sees in the text but to see how far I can find my own way into it. This series prepares the ground for the breakthrough scholarship of the next sixty years."

....

Angela Zito, assistant professor of religion at Barnard College, co-editor of *Body, Subject, and Power in China* (Chicago, 1994), and author of *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in 18th-Century China* (Chicago, forthcoming).

Zito hails the work of **Craig Clunas**. "In ***Superfluous Things*** (University of Illinois, 1992), Clunas explores man-

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uals of connoisseurship that detailed the proper accoutrements for a literate Ming dynasty gentleman. He then demonstrates how these handbooks became valued accoutrements themselves. His ***Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China*** (Duke, 1996) treats the Ming garden as a similar site for accumulating both economic and moral value. Agricultural spaces originally intended to satisfy household needs, gardens were later modeled after paintings—objects of luxurious consumption in their own right. Both these studies of anxious seventeenth-century elites combine a rare sensitivity to local Chinese practices with an insistence on their relevance to the rest of the world. Clunas's books are genuine contributions to overcoming stereotypes of an aestheticized, timeless Orient."

....

Lionel M. Jensen, professor of Chinese studies at the University of Colorado at Denver and author of *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Duke, forthcoming).

Jensen particularly values works that break with the long tradition of portraying China as the inscrutable antithesis of the West. "**James L. Hevia**'s brilliant account of a famous Chinese-British encounter in the eighteenth century, ***Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*** (Duke, 1995), undermines the notion of a primitive China rolled over by a sophisticated West by emphasizing the ritualistic, cosmological components of England's imperial project and the instrumental rationality inherent in China's resistance to it. For compelling social history, you can't beat **Philip A. Kuhn**'s ***Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768*** (Harvard, 1990), which has the breathtaking turns of the best detective fiction. It interprets the Chinese state's brutal investigation of a reported epidemic of 'soul stealing' in the south of China as a hysterical response to the fear of class revolt as the middle kingdom entered its modern period: The national economy had reached a point where increased production could not solve growing disparities in income—a state of affairs Kuhn compares to Lester Thurow's interpretation of the contemporary United States as a 'zero-sum society.'"

....

Michael Schoenhals, director of the Lund University Center for Asian Studies in Lund, Sweden and editor of *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966–1969:* Not *a Dinner Party* (M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

"Past Western writings on the Cultural Revolution," Schoenhals says, "relegated working men and women to a dimly lit part of the historical stage. The perspective adopted by academic writers and journalists alike put Mao firmly at the center, interacting almost exclusively with intellectuals, military men, and professional politicians. In their groundbreaking ***Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*** (Westview, 1997), **Elizabeth J. Perry** and **Li Xun** boldly shift that conventional perspective and put China's urban workers in focus. As a result, their book succeeds like no other in clarifying what drove ordinary people to political activism, in illuminating the complex social history of the Cultural Revolution, and in challenging some of our most cherished beliefs about state-society relations in Mao's China."

....

Elizabeth J. Perry, professor of government at Harvard University, author of *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford, 1993), and co-author of *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Westview, 1997).

Perry recommends a work that questions "the once-dominant structural explanations of the origins of Chinese communism." **R. Keith Schoppa**'s ***Blood Road: The Mystery of Shen Dingyi in Revolutionary China*** (California, 1995), she says, "sets a new standard for histories of the Chinese revolution. This beautifully written book chronicles the life and death of one of the more enigmatic figures of revolutionary China, the activist Shen Dingyi. In telling the story in a most unlikely form—that of a murder mystery—Schoppa shows us just how uncertain and contingent the course of the Chinese revolution really was."

RICK PERLSTEIN

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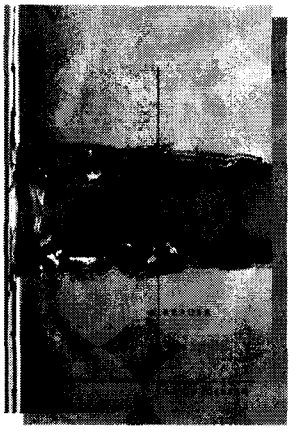

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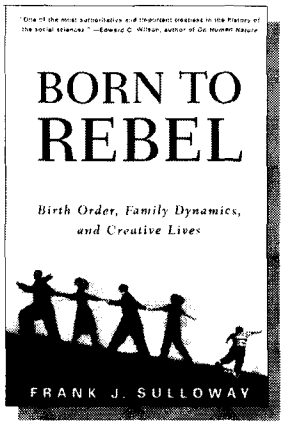

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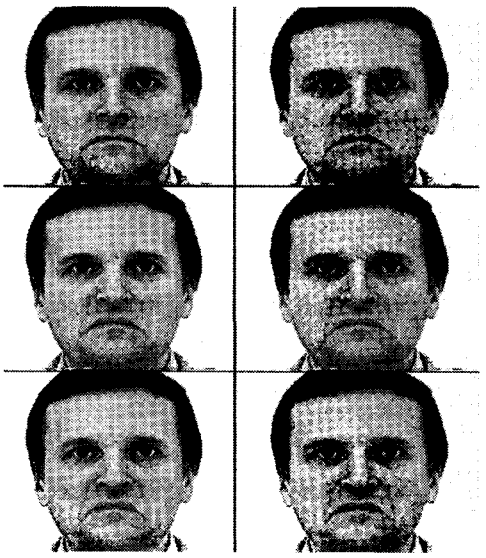
WRITTEN ON THE FACE

WANT TO KNOW THE FORMULA FOR HAPPINESS? According to Paul Ekman, a psychologist at the University of California at San Francisco, the answer's simple: 12+6 AU. This may seem a tad technical, and indeed it is: Ekman's numbers correspond to physiology not feeling. His Facial Action Coding System (FACS) measures the movements of the forty-odd muscles in the face; and as far as he's been able to determine, the closest we come to pure delight is with a combination clench of the zygomatic major (the grin muscles, or Action Unit 12) and the orbicularis oculi (the muscles surrounding the eye, or Action Unit 6). Sadness may be defined just as crisply: 1+4+6+11 AU. In plain English, that means "the inner corners of the brows drawn together and upward, cheeks raised, slight deepening of the nasolabial fold, and slight depression of the lip corners."

Ekman's obsessive mapping of the human face is part of a Darwinian quest to prove that facial expressions are hardwired, largely involuntary, displays of human affect. A new Oxford anthology co-edited by Ekman, *What the Face Reveals,* offers a gallery of tantalizing FACS experiments that support his claim. While some of the results are not exactly surprising—for example, a lurch of Action Unit 5, the "eyelid raiser," turns out to be the key signal for surprise—other FACS research suggests that frame-by-frame scrutiny of the face can pick up fleeting visual cues that otherwise get lost in real-time conversations. Despite our best intentions to suppress or conceal our emotions, it seems they're written all over our face—whether we like it or not.

The FACS system is laborious but simple: All possible facial movements, from the everyday (blinks, nose wrinkles) to the exotic (lip compressions, cheek puffs), are assigned a classification number between 1 and 46. Through careful notation of photographs and video stills, FACS researchers can chart a subject's changing facial landscape. By comparing observed facial patterns with subjects' self-reports of emotional states, FACS researchers claim to have isolated characteristic expressions for seven discrete emotions—anger, fear, contempt, disgust, sadness, surprise, and happiness.

Ekman himself is a distinguished pioneer in the field of evolutionary psychology. Back in the Sixties, he started out his career as a disciple of B.F. Skinner, who argued that emotions were mere "unobservables" and thus not worthy of serious inquiry. As for facial expressions, behaviorists viewed them as arbitrary gestures learned in infancy through reward and punishment. Ekman set out to prove this notion by contrasting the facial repertoires of Americans with those of the Fore, an isolated Papua New Guinean tribe. But the Fore refuted the behaviorist thesis: When asked to act out a humorous story, tribespeople began flashing Kodak smiles; when describing frightening hunting tales, they adopted Hitchcockian poses. As Ekman says now, "I was dead wrong, and it was the most exciting discovery of my life."



So Ekman turned to Darwin, who in 1872 penned a monograph called *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* which argued that "the same state of mind is expressed throughout the world with remarkable uniformity." While Ekman recognizes the role of culture in establishing "display rules"—social values that dictate when it's appropriate to smile in public, for example—he nonetheless insists that facial gestures have fixed biological underpinnings. In the anthology, Ekman cites a study comparing the expressions of American and Japanese toddlers who were physically restrained for several minutes. FACS reveals that both sets of impeded tots display the same group of Action Units associated with anger.

"An emotion can't be fully masked," says Ekman.

What are the implications of this universalist thesis? Try as we might to mold our emotional displays, Ekman suggests, involuntary responses keep leaking through. "To me, an emotion can't be fully masked," says Ekman. "We can't feel

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something intensely and not show it at all." This insight has led some researchers to use FACS as a sort of subliminal-message decoder. Take Ekman's famous case study of "Mary," a suicidal patient who manipulated her therapists into granting her release from the hospital. Just before leaving, she admitted her deception. Fortunately for Ekman, Mary's false statements at the exit interview had been videotaped. Using FACS, he determined that her underlying despair was, however briefly, written on her face: "In a moment's pause before replying to her doctor's question about her plans for the future, we saw in slow motion a fleeting facial expression of despair, so quick that we had missed seeing it the first few times we examined the film. Once we had the idea that concealed feelings might be evidenced in these very brief *micro expressions,* we searched and found many more, typically covered in an instant by a smile."

FACS has uncovered numerous "slips of the face." In a related essay on suicide faces, the Swiss psychologists Michael Heller and Veronique Haynal describe FACS experiments that reveal significant differences in facial expressions between suicidal and non-suicidal depressed patients. The two researchers interviewed residents of a Geneva psychiatry ward, half of whom had recently attempted to kill themselves. A FACS analysis was conducted to analyze nonverbal responses to the question "Do you still wish to take your own life?" The results were unexpected: Most of the suicidal patients displayed flashes of contempt and disgust when answering the question, while none of the non-suicidal patients did.

Other researchers have used FACS as a facial polygraph. How can one tell a genuine smile from a false one? According to several papers in the anthology, the telltale sign of a genuine smile isn't a wide grin but a deep eye scrunch. These "felt happy smiles," one Ekman-led study notes, typically feature "apex coordination," with the eye closure reaching its maximum intensity at the same time the grin reaches its fullest height. Real smiles are also shorter and smoother in execution than anxious or faked varieties. One can only imagine what HMOs could do with such a diagnostic tool.

And yet FACS itself is hardly perfect. According to one paper, faked lower-back pain looks just like the real thing to FACS. "This is a frustrating finding," admits Ekman. "But while the face is a key signal system, there are others, like the voice and gestures, that may have more pivotal roles with certain emotions." Similarly, attempts to venture beyond the Big Seven emotions have proved tricky; one of the most recent papers in the anthology suggests that embarrassment is evinced not through a "snapshot expression" but rather through a sequence of movements (most prominently, lip compression, Action Unit 24) combined with gestures like lowering the face. And FACS may never be able to pinpoint exact patterns for emotions like jealousy or disappointment.

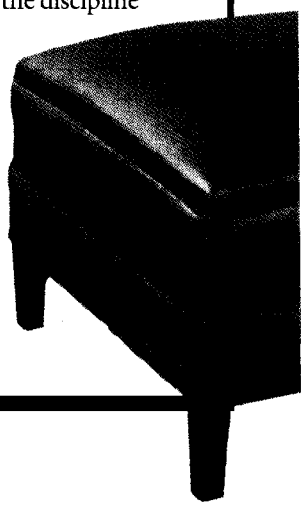
Another barrier to progress is FACS's speed. At present, five minutes of videotape takes around twelve hours to transcribe. Fortunately, Terry Sejnowski, an artificial intelligence theorist at San Diego's Salk Institute, is working with Ekman to develop a computerized neural network that will almost instantly translate a facial image into a list of Action Units. According to Ekman, "it should be up and running within five years." The 400 psychologists currently certified to use FACS must be salivating. After all, when reading a face becomes as easy as making one, who knows what they'll uncover?

DANIEL ZALEWSKI

NO RESPECT

FOR THE REPUTABLE PSYCHOBIOGRAPHER, amateur scholars like Herbert Barry III pose a credibility problem. Barry, a professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, has made a hobby of putting presidents on the couch. In a 1990 paper titled "Intensified Maternal Identification Among Recent Presidents," for example, Barry attributes the aggressive impulses of six U.S. presidents to the fact that they bore their mothers' maiden name as a middle name. (They tended to "stronger feminine identification accompanied by reaction formation leading to exaggerated masculine behavior," he argues.) Another essay of his, published in a Mensa newsletter, traces the origins of former president Gerald Ford's internationalist foreign policy to the fact that he was born on Bastille Day.

If serious scholars resent a figure like Barry, it may be in part because they are so often accused of being pseudoscientists themselves. Since its inception in the Sixties with books like Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther,* the discipline of psychobiography has often been ridiculed for its efforts to draw connections between, say, Hitler's putative single testicle and his reign of terror. Even specialists in historical biography and psychoanalysis, the two fields that spawned the discipline, treat it like an illegitimate child. Historians tend to mis-



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trust theory-based inferences linking adult leadership decisions to childhood trauma, while many psychoanalysts believe that data gathered by means other than one-on-one analysis are clinically unreliable. Richard Nixon summed up academic sentiment well in his 1982 memoir, *Leaders: Profiles and Reminiscences of Men Who Have Shaped the World,* dismissing "most of the so-called new 'science' of psychobiography" as "pure baloney."

But keeping in mind Freud's observation that resistance is an inevitable part of the cure, professional psychobiographers toil on undaunted, subjecting leaders from Gandhi to Stalin to examination on the virtual coach. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a favorite analysand has been Nixon himself, the most conspicuously unstable of recent American presidents. By the time he was equating psychobiography with lunch meat, Nixon had already been treated to no fewer than five book-length psychological profiles and even undergone a series of face-to-face sessions with a Manhattan internist. This man, Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker, who secretly treated Nixon for several years during the Fifties, also published his thoughts—albeit only his most discreet ones—about his former patient.

Nixon's psyche is apparently still fertile ground. This month, Columbia University Press is releasing *Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography,* with the promise that some of the lingering mysteries of Nixon's volatile personality will finally be put to rest. "What lay behind his obsessive hunger for power and control, his paranoid offensives against enemies real and perceived, his refusal to accept defeat?" pants the promotional copy. "Why did a man who had achieved so much feel so angry and unfulfilled even at the height of his power?"

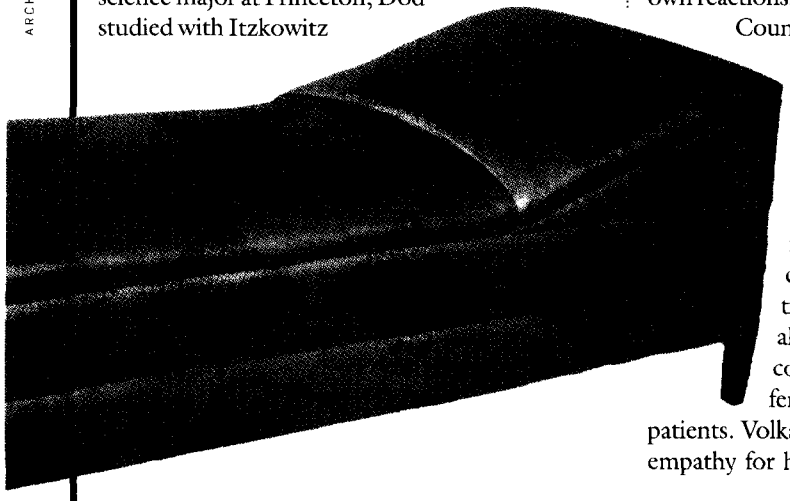
The book itself is the collaborative effort of two trained analysts, University of Virginia psychiatrist Vamik D. Volkan and Princeton professor of Near Eastern studies Norman Itzkowitz, and an Atlanta-based corporate marketing consultant named Andrew W. Dod. As an undergraduate political science major at Princeton, Dod studied with Itzkowitz and was inspired by Volkan and Itzkowitz's 1984 biography *The Immortal Atatürk,* which explores the psychological motivations of modern Turkey's authoritarian founding father. Dod decided to subject Nixon to a similar analysis in his senior thesis. "The day I handed in my thesis," he recalls, "Professor Itzkowitz said, 'Great, you get an A-plus. Now you have two options: You can try to publish this on your own, or you can keep working on this with me and Dr. Volkan.'" The three men spent nearly a decade on the book—more time than most patients spend in analysis. Ultimately, Volkan and Itzkowitz did the bulk of the work, but, for the most part, Dod's undergraduate speculations passed clinical muster.

A favorite analysand has been Nixon, the most conspicuously unstable of recent presidents.

In contrast to the promotional hyperbole, the book's authors are cautious and conditional in their approach to their subject. Still, they detect plenty of Oedipal struggle and castration anxiety in the Nixonian psyche. Take, for example, the former president's difficulty in firing his aides. Having remarked that Frank Nixon, Richard's brutal father, was a butcher who worked frequently with knives, they go on to cite Nixon's comments to David Frost on the firing of H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman: "I cut off one arm and then cut off the other arm." The authors conclude, "Since he considered them to be extensions of himself at one level, to 'butcher' them or any other staff member meant 'butchering' himself."

"The tools that we've developed to look psychoanalytically at someone who has never been on the couch are basically two," Itzkowitz explains. "One is repeated action"—noticing patterns in Nixon's behavior toward other people to learn about his transferences—"and the other is to monitor our own reactions, to look at the countertransference."

Countertransference, the reactions of an analyst to his subject, can involve conscious prejudices (Dod describes himself as conservative; Volkan is a liberal; and Itzkowitz says he is such a party-line Democrat that "there's never been a vote for a Republican in my family, not even for dogcatcher") as well as unconscious emotional responses. Volkan and Itzkowitz also formed their view of Nixon by comparing their Nixon countertransferences to their past reactions to real patients. Volkan says: "I began to develop a lot of empathy for him about his childhood. I human-



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ized him more. The tendency to say bad things, to make fun of him—those kinds of things I became more aware of."

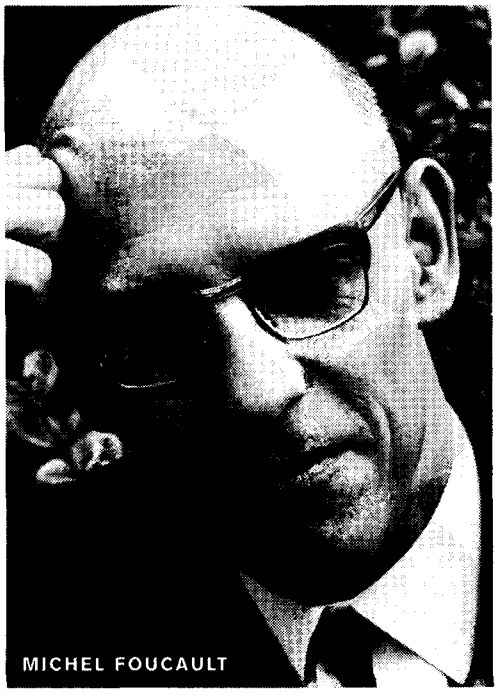
For all their sobriety of purpose, the authors will not be surprised if their work on Nixon earns them more laughter than praise. Although Newt Gingrich holds *The Immortal Atatürk* in high esteem, historians, psychoanalysts, and Greeks and Turks alike, says Volkan, considered the book "bullshit" because it dwells on the neurotic compulsions of a leader known for his shrewd political calculations.

Such violent rejection suggests the discipline may be fighting against more than just ordinary skepticism and encroachment by dilettantes. "There's enormous resistance to the idea that people in power have foibles and that we are all subject to them," says Betty Glad, Olin D. Johnston Professor of Political Science at the University of South Carolina and author of the psychologically inflected biography *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House* (Norton, 1980). "We really want to think that people who have made it are okay. There are just these puzzles that you can't explain, and many people would rather leave them unexplained than admit that power has something to do with pathology." Or, for that matter, one's testicle.

BLAKE ESKIN

THE CARE OF THE AUDIENCE

"I HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE who are there like the one an actor or an acrobat has with his audience. And when I've finished speaking, a feeling of total solitude." That's how Michel Foucault described the experience of lecturing to overflow crowds at the Collège de France in 1975. Five years earlier, Foucault had been named to the college's chair in the History of Systems of Thought, filling a spot vacated by the noted Hegel scholar Jean Hyppolite. The position required him to give twelve hours of lectures on an original topic each year. Given Foucault's fame by the early Seventies, this meant an auditorium that could seat 300 was packed with 500 people and hundreds more crowded into an adjacent room to listen to his piped-in voice. It was, Foucault said, "a kind of circus." Yet for all of the chaos surrounding him, Foucault's lectures—delivered from written notes—were, in the words of one observer, "limpid... without the slightest concession to improvisation." They went on in that manner from the time of Foucault's appointment until his untimely death in 1984.



MICHEL FOUCAULT

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Still, for more than a decade, the lectures remained unpublished—save for one course, which was printed in an unauthorized Italian edition—even as samizdat versions in typescript or on tape circulated freely. Earlier this year, this gap in the record was finally filled when Gallimard/Seuil published the first volume in a series that will eventually include all the courses. St. Martin's Press has now acquired the American rights and should have its first volume ready for publication in early 1999. The house then plans to publish one volume a year until all thirteen lecture series are in print. For good or ill, Foucault's continuing popularity in the American academy is something publishers are betting on. (St. Martin's won the rights to the lectures after a brief, intense competition with the New Press, which is in the process of publishing a three-volume series of Foucault's previously uncollected writings.)

For the most part, the early lectures hew close to the topics of Foucault's best-known work: There are courses titled "Penal Theories and Institutions," "The Punitive Society," and "Psychiatric Power." The middle lectures, though, illuminate his intellectual transformations during the mid- to late Seventies. Turning from surveillance to statistics, he became particularly interested in "biopolitics," a phrase he used to describe the modern state's efforts to manage the problems presented by any large group of humans: "health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race." In his early work, Foucault had argued that definitions of normalcy and deviance mold even our most intimate understandings of ourselves as individual subjects. He then turned to biopolitics to show how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new ideas about the state's responsibility for ensuring the "welfare" of its citizens worked to define those citizens as members of a given population—one whose health and well-being it was in the state's interest to foster. The courses from what might loosely be called his middle period thus include "Security, Territory, and Population" and "The Birth of Biopolitics."

At the same time, Foucault began to lay aside many of his more apocalyptic formulations. The

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discomfort he now felt with his earlier Maoist flirtations was especially evident in the 1975–1976 lecture series "Il faut défendre la société," in which he investigated the idea that politics is just war by other means. (St. Martin's first volume will present this series.) What has it meant, he asked, that so many Western thinkers—including the fervent antimonarchist Boulainvilliers in France, Coke and Lilburne in England, and radicals of all stripes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—have taken war as at once "the guiding principle and the motor of the exercise of political power"? More explicitly, he examined the relation between racism and revolutionary thinking, pointing to the reliance of both fascism and ultraleftism on talk of exclusion and extermination. He quoted Marx writing to Engels: "Our class struggle, you know very well where we found it: we found it in the work of the French historians when they tell the story of the war of races." Insofar as socialist states were concerned with internal purification—with the elimination of class enemies and of those deemed opponents of the state—they were, Foucault contended, necessarily marked by racism.

Given Foucault's own advocacy of bloody class struggle just a couple of years earlier, this was a powerfully self-critical conclusion. But his move away from revolutionary radicalism did not lead him to embrace political liberalism. In fact, in his last four lectures at the college, he turned sharply away from questions of politics and government. Where he had once fixated on the ways in which discourse or the state turned individuals into subjects, at the end of his life he became concerned with the ways in which ancient Greeks and Romans or early Christians had turned *themselves* into subjects. His later lectures articulate an ethic of mastery over the body and mind—what he called "care of the self"—to be achieved through meditation, the practice of writing, or "exercises for committing to memory the things that one has learned."

Ethics, in the sense Foucault used the term, did not have to do with universal moral prescriptions but rather with the adoption of "a way of being and behavior" appropriate to a free person. He knew that many would see something politically quietist about this turn. Yet during his final lectures, on the subject of Socrates, Foucault seemed to suggest that the shaping of one's life was not so much a withdrawal from the world as an engagement with it. In his dialogues, Socrates insisted that he was not only taking care of his own self but also leading others to take care of their selves. In the lectures, one can see Foucault—as acrobat, as Stoic—trying to do the same.

JAMES SUROWIECKI

CURIOUS GEORGIANS

EARLY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, A LONDON landscape painter named Vanderstraeten plied his trade most peculiarly. In the words of one visitor to his garret, he painted "cloths many feet in length...continuing the sky from one end to the other, and then several grounds, etc., til the whole was one long landscape. This he cut and sold by parcels as demanded to fit chimnies, etc., and those who dealt in this way would go to his house and buy three or four, or any number." The mechanistic manner in which Vanderstraeten churned out his landscapes did not dismay his visitor, Joseph Highmore. To the contrary, Highmore was inspired by Vanderstraeten to take up the brush himself: He eventually made it big as an illustrator of Samuel Richardson's novels.

Since Highmore's time, commentators on eighteenth-century English culture have generally preferred to paper over hucksterism such as Vanderstraeten's—exposing it largely to deride it, much as Samuel Johnson mocked the "small histories" and "temporary poetry" of Grub Street hacks. Thus when John Brewer presents Highmore's affectionate description of Vanderstraeten's studio as a chapter-opening anecdote in his new book, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (FSG), it signals a significant break with scholarly tradition. Brewer focuses his cultural history of a famously decorous age on the lowly consumer market, highlighting the ways Georgian-age artists—from workaday tradesmen like Vanderstraeten to innovative writers like Richardson—crafted their works for the delectation of a voracious new middle-class public.

If you thought modern consumerism began with the department store or the credit card, think again.

Brewer, a former UCLA professor who now teaches graduate students at the EEC's European University in Florence, is perhaps best known for his widely praised treatment of the origins of British high finance, *The Sinews of Power* (Knopf,

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1989). But he's long harbored a fascination with the everyday tumult of consumer culture. In 1982 Brewer, Neil McKendrick, and their Cambridge mentor J.H. Plumb published a jointly edited book of their essays titled *The Birth of a Consumer Society,* which argued that the surge in demand for goods in eighteenth-century England constituted a Consumer Revolution, a systemic upheaval that served as a springboard for that other, more famous upheaval—the Industrial Revolution. And over the past five years, Brewer has served as co-editor of three massive Routledge anthologies: *Consumption and the World of Goods, Early Modern Conceptions of Property,* and *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800,* the volume that most anticipates the themes of his current book. Among the scholars weighing in are Chandra Mukerji on how the French passion for sumptuous courtly gardens in the seventeenth century helped kick-start capitalist enterprise; Sidney Mintz on the emergence of "drug foods" like sugar, tea, and chocolate; and Kathleen Wilson on the sordid vision of business culture presented in *The London Merchant,* a 1371 play that tells the story of an apprentice sea merchant who accepts a bribe. If you thought that modern consumerism began with the department store or the credit card, Brewer and his colleagues urge you to think again.

As ambitious as the 700-page *Pleasures of the Imagination* is, then, it represents something of a narrowing of scope for Brewer. He treats only one nation and only one century. Moreover, rather than examine eighteenth-century British culture in all its button-buying, animal-breeding, tea-drinking variety, Brewer confines himself mainly to those arenas now thought of as high culture. Still, there's nothing all that modest about the synthesis he seeks to achieve. Brewer spotlights the familiar accomplishments of the eighteenth-century arts while showing how these creations reflect the dictates of the bookshop, the gallery, and the concert hall. As Brewer depicts them, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson rule over clubs and publishing houses, battling Grub Street rivals and vying for readers; theatrical figures like David Garrick and Sarah Siddons participate in a culture of spectacle that embraces both the shows at Vauxhall Gardens and the dens of vice in theater neighborhoods; the public's passion for hearing Handel's oratorios performed by disciplined professional groups turns out to be the flip side of its dismay at the dissonant efforts of amateur provincial orchestras. "I aimed,

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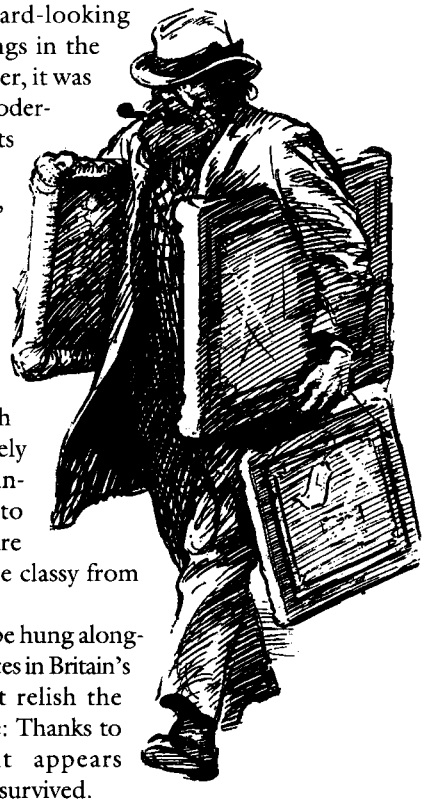
with this book," says Brewer, "to seduce the unfamiliar reader into an understanding of high culture not predicated on an idea of art as a laying on of the hands of genius or as a dialogue among the Olympian greats."

The idea may be familiar, but there's a definite timeliness to Brewer's popularization of such an understanding of Georgian art. Today's cultural conservatives have frequently championed the carefully arrayed canons and stately prose style of eighteenth-century high culture. The editors of *The New Criterion,* for example, are wont to quote Alexander Pope. And they began their inaugural editorial by citing Sir Walter Scott's disdain, in 1809, for the "deleterious doctrines" promulgated by the overtly political *Edinburgh Review.* In doing so, they linked Scott's preference for the more genteel style of literary journalism associated with the eighteenth century with their own attachment to "an independent high culture and the distinctions that separate it from popular culture and commercial entertainment."

In his conclusion, Brewer takes issue with such associations: "It is not unusual for critics to cite the eighteenth century," he says, as a time "when cultural histories were respected and the rule of taste prevailed." But it's worth remembering, insists Brewer, that such backward-looking thinking actually has its beginnings in the eighteenth century itself. Moreover, it was exactly the "commercialism and modernity" energizing the Georgian arts that originally provoked this nostalgia for "an earlier, better age, when the arts were patronized by men of taste and discernment, who broadly agreed about what constituted good art and what values it expressed." In other words, the eighteenth century's anxieties over the mingling of high and low cultures—anxieties closely related to its fears about the mingling of social ranks—gave rise to the strict standards of taste that are currently deployed to separate the classy from the commercial.



So should Vanderstraeten's art be hung alongside Reynolds and Turner masterpieces in Britain's National Gallery? Brewer might relish the scandal, but, alas, it can't be done: Thanks to those belching chimneys, it appears Vanderstraeten's canvases haven't survived.

SAMUEL BAKER

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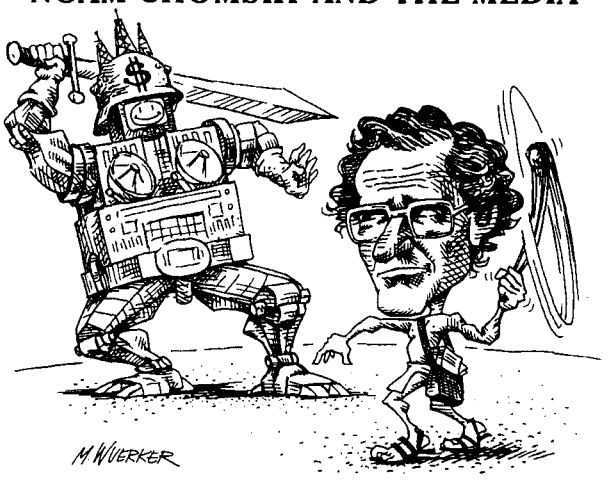

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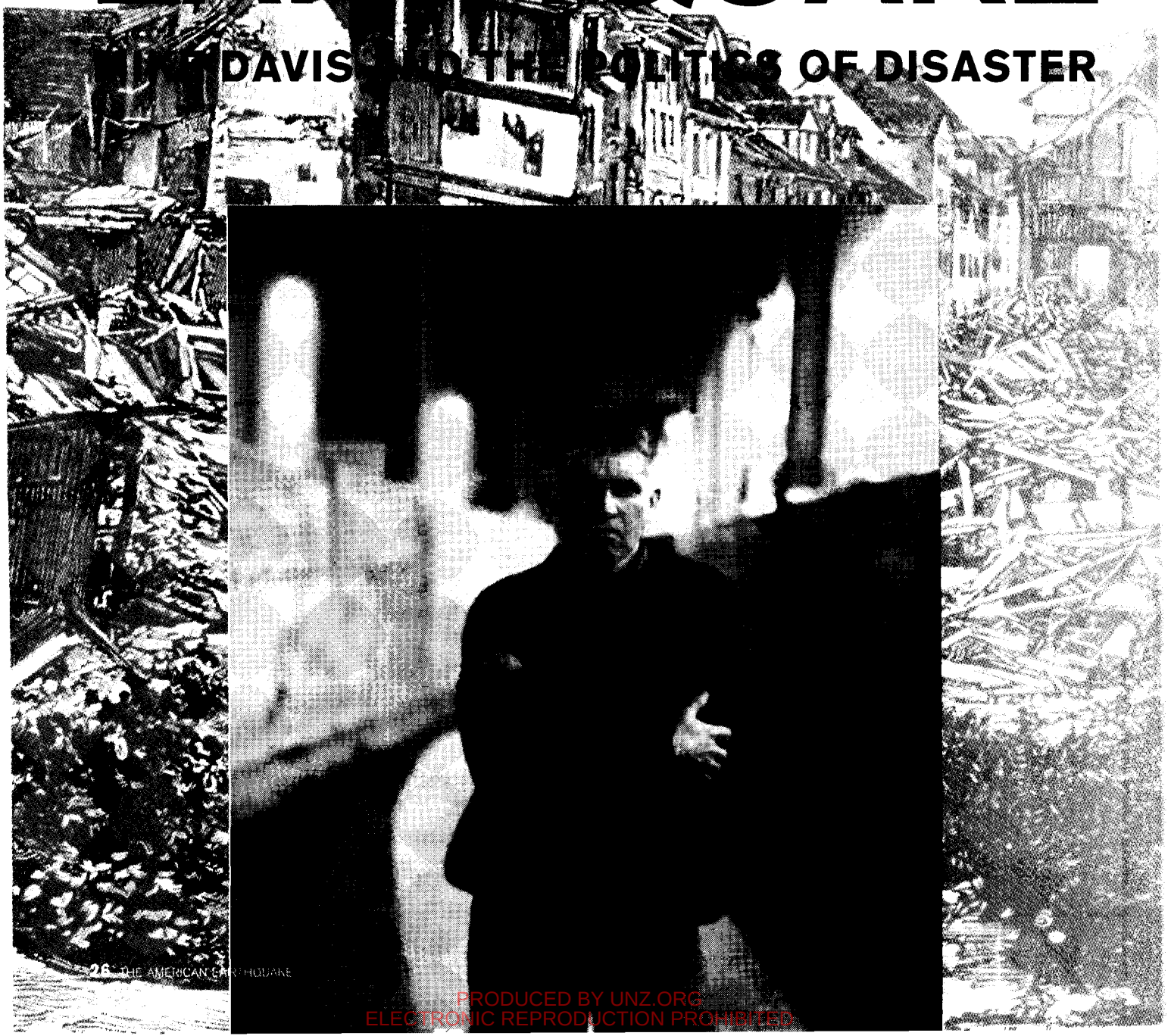
THE AMERICAN EARTHQUAKE

MIKE DAVIS AND THE POLITICS OF DISASTER



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PHONING MIKE DAVIS IS A GOOD WAY of getting acquainted with his answering machine. It is a virtually futile way of getting hold of the celebrated author of *City of Quartz*. Before arriving in Los Angeles, where Davis lives and writes, I'd had no luck reaching him. Sitting on his porch on a warm evening this past June, I understood why: The phone rang incessantly, and Davis never once rose from his chair.

The calls last from morning to midnight. It might be the photographer Richard Avedon or the architect I.M. Pei with a request for one of Davis's legendary tours of L.A. It could be *Backlash* author Susan Faludi, whom Davis has introduced to young gang members for her upcoming book on masculinity, or former Crip leader Dewayne Holmes, a Davis confidante who works in state senator Tom Hayden's L.A. office. It might also be a Danish curator mounting an exhibit on the postmodern city, an organizer with the hotel workers' union, a student at UCLA's Cesar Chavez Center, or (very likely) a Hollywood screenwriter. What this motley crew has in common is a belief that Mike Davis holds the keys to understanding the city of Los Angeles, and much else. In his writings on Southern California, the American working class, and the lives of the dispossessed, Davis offers dark parables of a post-liberal America poised on the brink of ruin.

City of Quartz

Mike Davis

Mike Davis's reputation rests largely on *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Vintage), his 1990 chronicle of the city's history from the socialist cooperative of Llano del Río to *Blade Runner*–style capitalism. The book appeared at a serendipitous moment: A full decade of Reaganism had remade American society in the image of Southern California, with its volatile mix of squalid inner cities and gated communities. But *City of Quartz* had merits of its own: Here was an urban history that took to heart Lewis Mumford's admonishment that rebuilding a city "involves the larger task of rebuilding our civilization." In arresting meditations on homeowners' revolts, Daryl Gates's police department, Frank Gehry's aesthetics, Anglo-Latino conflicts within the Catholic Church, and the death of the steel industry, Davis took the reader on a kaleidoscopic tour of contemporary L.A. Even as he offered vivid street-smart reportage (and frequently breathtaking prose), Davis projected a distinctive historical vision, a New Left Marxism infused with working-class nostalgia—and apocalyptic rage.

"Contemporary urban America," he flatly declared, "is more like Victorian England than Walt Whitman's or La Guardia's New York. In Los Angeles, once-upon-a-time a demi-paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks, and 'cruising strips,' genuinely democratic space is all but extinct. The Oz-like archipelago of Westside pleasure domes—a continuum of tony malls, arts centers, and gourmet strips—is reciprocally dependent upon the social imprisonment of the third-world service proletariat who live in increasingly repressive ghettoes and barrios.... Even as the walls have come down in Eastern Europe, they are being erected all over Los Angeles." Two years after the book's publication came the L.A. riots, lending Davis's analysis a luster of prophecy.

A more curious aspect of *City of Quartz*'s appeal was its design, marrying

BY **ADAM SHATZ**

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postmodern cool and Bogartian machismo. Robert Morrow's photograph of the eerily glamorous turquoise observatory of the Metropolitan Detention Center graced the cover, while William Gibson's back-cover blurb proclaimed the book "more cyberpunk than any work of fiction could ever be." Although Davis—with his boyish frame, liquid-blue eyes, and gently weathered face—lacks any hint of menace in person, his mug shot on the inside jacket radiated tough guy: arms folded defiantly, dressed in black, glowering at the reader. He was described as "a native son" and "former meat cutter and long-distance truck driver" who incidentally "teaches urban theory at the Southern California Institute of Architecture." The packaging paid off. *City of Quartz* became a cult hit, appealing to readers far beyond its target audience of left-leaning urban geographers and historians—including Bruce Willis, a big donor to Newt Gingrich, who was recently glimpsed reading the book in a *New York Times Magazine* feature.

Meanwhile, the man who blasted suburban escapism and took us down L.A.'s mean streets has turned his attention to the furies of nature, a move that may puzzle many of his admirers. *The Ecology of Fear,* which will be published next spring by Metropolitan Books, is a richly eccentric study of the social and political significance of natural disasters. Treating environmental history as a window into "larger class struggles," Davis argues that justice and ecology amount to the same thing in the Land of Sunshine. Unchecked urbanization has not only laid waste to democratic public space but "transgressed environmental common-sense," thus inviting nature's revenge. A work of distinctly millennial cadences, *The Ecology of Fear* conjures up a catastrophe-prone landscape governed by a geological "dialectic of ordinary disaster" and visited occasionally by cougars, snakes, and killer bees. The fire next time, it seems, may come from the sky as well as the streets.

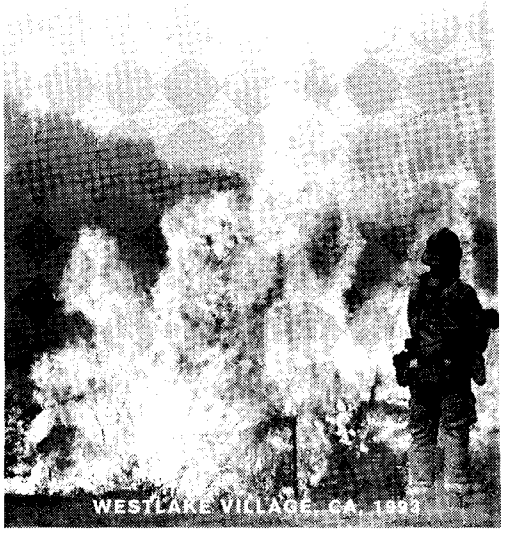
IN THE PAST few years, Davis has retreated from the public-intellectual circuit, rarely granting interviews. "I'm really not that interesting," he protests weakly. Coming from a man so attentive to the creation of his literary persona, the self-effacement can ring a little hollow. But behind it lies the defensiveness of a proud outsider uneasy with celebrity. "Mike is a very romantic guy who has this image of himself as a working-class revolutionary," says journalist Alexander Cockburn, a longtime friend and admirer of Davis. For the better part of his adult life, Davis has been on the road: He was still making ends meet as a truck driver long after many of his friends on the left found permanent sanctuary in the academy.

LOS ANGELES, 1994

With *City of Quartz* came the fruits—and the bruising ironies—of mainstream recognition. L.A.'s poor have seen little improvement in their lives since the riots, while Davis, who took up his pen to dramatize their plight, has acquired a small piece of the California dream, the very idea he set out to debunk. He received a $50,000 advance for *The Ecology of Fear.* He won a Getty Fellowship. And he entered the ranks of L.A. homeowners, the vanguard of complacency in *City of Quartz,* moving into a modest gray-stucco house in Pasadena, just south of the San Gabriel Mountains. (He lives there with the Mexican political artist, Alessandra Moctezuma, his fifth wife.) "Ever since I got a mortgage, I've been corrupted," Davis half jokes. "I've been dreaming about my lawn and worrying about my property values."

That said, he still has to hustle to make a living. A tenure-track position continues to elude Davis, who averages five adjunct courses a semester at various schools. "Mike is a brilliant loose cannon and also a kind of wonderful political journalist, and neither of these would be accepted by peers at a major university," says Davis's friend and erstwhile employer, Ed Soja, a UCLA geographer.

Davis, who never completed his Ph.D. in history at UCLA, has his own misgivings about the academy. As the father of two school-age children, he needs the security of a steady income, but he has not made it easy for departments to bring him on board. This spring the University of Southern California nearly offered him an endowed chair in American history. Davis, who had spray painted the university's walls with anti-Vietnam graffiti in 1965, was thrilled but warned administrators, "You'll have intractable problems if you hire me." When friends in the food-service workers' union informed him that the university was contracting out the jobs of its cafeteria workers, Davis assailed the school in the *L.A. Weekly* as "the most reactionary institution in L.A." A top administrator accused him of slander, and the job was given to someone else.


WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA, 1993

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Even when his extracurricular politics are not the issue, Davis's pedagogical practices might well cause a university to think twice about tenuring him. Once, while teaching at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, he devised an experiment to prove that one could feel reasonably safe in any neighborhood in L.A. in the middle of the night. One of his students, a crown prince of Fiji, decided to test this idea in Hollywood. There he met a handful of drug dealers, and they ended up having a marvelous time—until they were jumped by another group of

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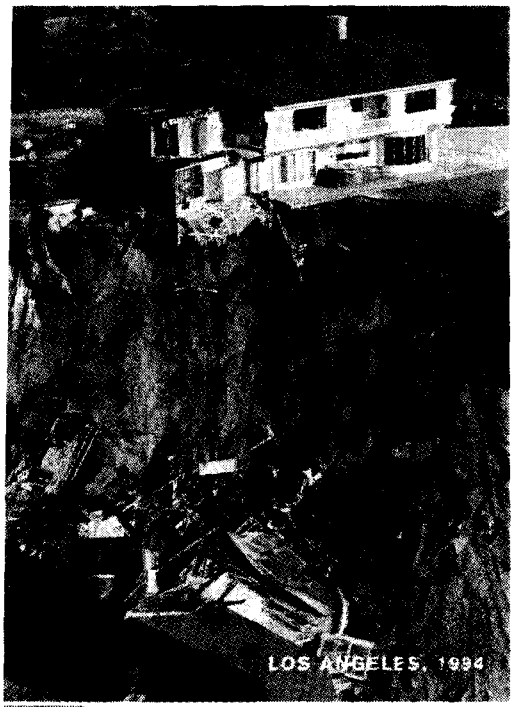

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THE MAN WHO BLASTED SUBURBAN ESCAPISM AND TOOK US DOWN L.A.'S MEAN STREETS HAS NOW TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE FURIES OF NATURE.

dealers, who stabbed and nearly killed the prince. Davis recalls: "When I visited him in the hospital, I told him how sorry I was, but he said, 'No, Mike, I'll never be able to thank you for this. I would never have experienced anything like it in Fiji.'" Even so, Davis was almost fired over the incident. "I had to lie low for a while after that," he says with a smile.

THOUGH DAVIS may have become an angry messenger from the streets of L.A., he doesn't originally hail from the city. "I'm a white, middle-aged working-class guy who grew up in the far outer suburbs that turn out into the desert," he says. "That's my existential relation to the metropolis."

Davis was born in the dusty California town of Fontana in 1946. (The same year, a group of Fontanan motorcyclists founded the Hell's Angels.) The Fontana of Davis's childhood wasn't paradise, but there were plenty of decent jobs in Henry Kaiser's steel mill and in trucking. The unions were strong, and management relatively liberal. Mike's father, Dwight Davis, worked in town as a meat cutter. Fontana looms large in the Davis imagination, largely as a place of lost possibilities: Over the ensuing years, Fontana's steel industry was gutted, and what replaced it were inflated land prices and untrammeled development. Indeed, remembering the fate of his hometown inspires Davis to turn toward extravagant metaphors of disaster. As he wrote in the final chapter of *City of Quartz*, "The former primary steelworks itself looks like Dresden, Hiroshima, or perhaps the most fitting image, Tokyo in April 1945 after three months of concentrated fire-bombing with Kaiser-made 'goop.'"

Davis's family eventually moved to Bostonia, a hamlet east of San Diego—and the crucible for the writer's catastrophist sensibility. A number of residents of this military town imagined themselves on the brink of annihilation, thanks to rumors spread by the John Birch Society that an elite unit of Chinese troops on the Mexican border was poised to invade San Diego. On the weekends, families would go to the Marine recruiting depot to hear fiery anticommunist oratory and watch soldiers toss flamethrowers into the sky. Davis joined the Devil Pups (the Marines' answer to the Boy Scouts) and counted the days before he would "go somewhere in Asia to kill people." For a while, he was "a real Cold War fanatic."

When a heart attack left Davis's father temporarily disabled, his mother took her sixteen-year-old son out of school and put him to work at the Bostonia meat factory. And there he might have stayed had it not been for a black civil rights activist named Jim Stone.

The husband of Davis's cousin Carol, Stone cut a bold, charismatic figure. In 1962 Davis accompanied Stone to a demonstration against the all-white San Diego branch of the Bank of America. It was a kind of conversion experience conducted under the most harrowing conditions. "A group of redneck sailors drenched us with lighter fluid, and one of the guys started flicking his lighter," he recalls. Under Stone's tutelage, Davis transformed himself into a political activist, working at the San Diego offices of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). He finished high school and landed a full scholarship to Reed College.

His stay in Oregon, however, was short and unhappy. Painfully aware of being a working-class kid among the children of doctors and lawyers, he became belligerent, ultimately getting himself expelled for living illegally in his girlfriend's dorm. So Davis returned to full-time activism. In 1964 he joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), spending the next three years organizing sit-ins and protests on the West Coast. As the Vietnam War escalated, he grew further radicalized, eventually joining the Communist Party. For nearly two years, he managed the party's bookstore in L.A., not far from FBI headquarters.

In 1969, after being fired by Dorothy Healey, the regional party leader, for hounding the Russian cultural attaché out of the store—Davis despised the Soviets and didn't like them snooping around—he enrolled in a teamsters' opportunity program. For the next four years, he hauled 240-foot trailers filled with Barbie dolls out of L.A., acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of the city as well as of Western geography. In his spare time, he tried to master Marx's *Capital* and Sartre's *Search for a Method* and paid visits to Herbert Marcuse. Fellow left-wing truckers were rather hard to come by. "At night we'd go out to topless bars, and I'd blurt out, 'I'm a communist,' and they'd say, 'Dick's a Jehovah's Witness. Let's have another drink.'"

One day, Davis decided he had had enough and that he wanted to resume his education. A particularly jolting experience clinched his decision. "I had this job with a bus-tour company when suddenly this insanely violent strike broke out. A strikebreaker ran a bus over one of our guys, and next thing I knew I was in a room with forty guys voting on whether each of us is gonna put up $400 to hire a hit man to kill the head of the strikebreakers. I said, 'Hey, guys, this is just crazy,' and made the best speech of my life. I was outvoted thirty-nine to one. I

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thought to myself, 'Typical American workers'; I think I said 'pussies.' Instead of coming up with a political strategy, they reach for their guns as soon as they see a scab driving their bus. And here I am about to become a freshman at UCLA, and I'm going to get arrested for criminal conspiracy." Ironically, Davis was saved by the L.A. Police Department, which apprehended the hit men for drunk driving and seized their guns. The Westwood campus started to look like a pretty good alternative to trucking, given the dues the Teamsters union seemed to require of its members.

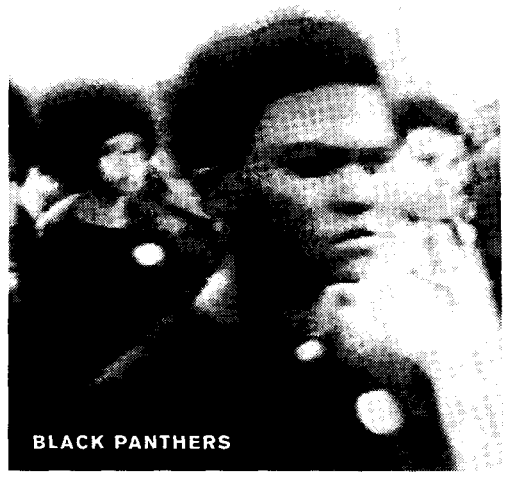
AS ALWAYS, though, Davis grew restless. After three years at UCLA, he packed his bags for Scotland on a fellowship to study Irish history. He was soon dividing his time among London, Edinburgh, and Belfast—conducting research and agitating for the independence of Northern Ireland. But what set his intellectual career in motion was falling in with a small but brilliant circle of European Marxists gathered around the *New Left Review*. Through his association with the Fourth International, a Trotskyist group, Davis met *NLR* editor Perry Anderson, who had just published *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, a magisterial history of European monarchies. Though Anderson's aristocratic background couldn't have been more distant from Davis's own, Robin Blackburn, the current *NLR* editor, recalls that they seemed kindred spirits, both possessing "this gift for mapping large trends." When Davis returned to complete his bachelor's at UCLA and begin graduate study in history, he kept in close contact with Anderson. Finally, after reading Davis's erudite essay on the Regulation School, a group of French Marxist economists, Anderson offered Davis a full-time position at *NLR*.

From 1980 to 1986, Davis worked out of the journal's London offices. He read voraciously. He established the Haymarket Series of Verso, *NLR*'s publisher, specializing in radical studies of North American politics and culture. And he began publishing chapters of his first book, an acerbic analysis of the American working class from the early nineteenth century to the Reagan years.

Published by Verso in 1986, and dedicated to El Salvador's guerrilla army, *Prisoners of the American Dream* was like a grenade thrown at the New Labor History pioneered by Herbert Gutman. Where the Gutmanites piously stressed the valiant resistance of American workers to capitalist power, Davis distinguished himself as the great antisentimentalist. American workers had indeed shown extraordinary militancy, but the more important fact was that they had almost nothing to show for it. Splintered by racial and ethno-religious divisions, confronted by an exceptionally large middle class, and lacking a social democratic party, the American labor movement had drifted from one defeat to the next, "disarmed... before the challenges and battles of the following period." Reaganism's successful assault on labor was the grim coda to this dirge.

It was only fitting that Davis should find his calling as a critic of Reaganism. According to his friend, writer Barry Sanders, "Mike had always been preparing for the worst." Now it had arrived. "In 1980, the worst nightmares of the American left appeared to come true," Davis wrote. "Like some shaggy beast of the apocalypse, Reaganism hunkered out of the Sunbelt, devouring liberal senators and Great Society programs in its path." In an analysis of Reaganism's social base, Davis argued that a "protean 'broad right,'" backed by open-shop Sun Belt corporations and affluent homeowners, would decisively reshape American politics. The neoliberal Democratic Leadership Council would conquer the Democratic Party, while the Republican Party would adopt the "high-growth, pro-entrepreneurial platform of Kemp and Gingrich." But for all his prescience, Davis occasionally let his apocalyptic streak, and his love of incendiary metaphor, run wild, as in his vision of a future "American West Bank of terrorized illegal laborers."

Although *Prisoners* received overwhelmingly favorable reviews in historical journals and the left press, it drew sharp criticism for presenting a closed and bleak universe that seemed almost wholly resistant to reform. In an otherwise laudatory review in *The Nation*, Yale labor historian David Montgomery asked, "What role are the prisoners to play in their own liberation?" At the offices of *NLR*, some had a similar reaction. "Mike is an exceptionally astute analyst of the enemy, but if I were an American trade union leader I wouldn't go to him to ask which way forward," editorial board member Tariq Ali told me.


BLACK PANTHERS

L.A. GANG MEMBERS

By and large, however, the *NLR* board was elated to have a precocious American—better yet, a precocious working-class American—wash up on its shores. "Marxists have long had this feeling that America shows us our future," explains Blackburn. "Mike's very robust, American working-class style further contributed to his charm." Yet, as even this circumspect editor concedes, "tact wasn't his strong suit." Some staffers thought Davis exploited his background. "Mike could be psychotic. He was very in-your-face about his identity," says a former *NLR* editor. As Davis himself admits, "I've always had a sort of truck-stop attitude toward effete intellectuals."

Among the first to feel its blows was Marxist literary critic par excellence Fredric Jameson. In his classic 1984 article, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson had breathlessly described L.A.'s

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DAVIS SAYS, "I'VE ALWAYS HAD A SORT OF TRUCK-STOP ATTITUDE TOWARD EFFETE INTELLECTUALS."

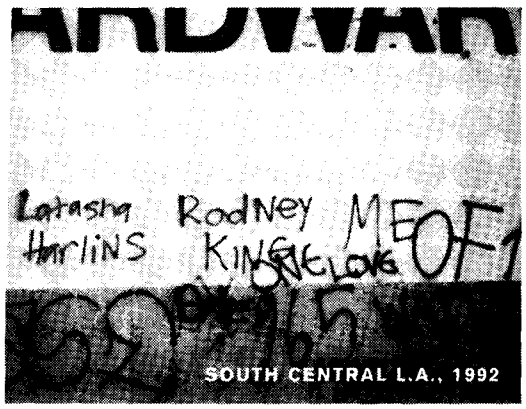

PHOTO (BOTTOM LEFT) MICHAEL GIBBS

Hotel Bonaventure as the archetypal postmodern structure. Its multiple entryways, elevated gardens, and glass mirrored surfaces formed a delirious "hyperspace," inciting those who entered it to "expand our sensorium." While noting in passing that the hotel's glass skin "repels the city outside," Jameson breezily praised the hotel as "a popular building, visited with enthusiasm by locals and tourists alike." Davis's response was unsparing: "To speak of its 'popular' character is to miss the point of its systematic segregation from the great Hispanic-Asian city outside," he thundered in *NLR* (where Jameson's essay had also appeared). Cutting through Jameson's theoretical haze, Davis emphasized the "smog-poisoned reality" outside and described the hotel as part of an ominous trend of "large vivariums for the upper middle classes, protected by astonishingly complex security systems." (In the endnotes to his 1991 book, *Postmodernism,* Jameson curtly dismissed Davis as "characteristic of the more 'militant' sounds from the Left.")

Davis's confrontational pose made for an unusually anxious workplace. At one *NLR* meeting, he stunned his audience into silence with the letter he had sent to Eugene Genovese, who had complained of being spurned by the journal: "Dear Professor Genovese, Fuck you." Then there was Davis's terrifying collection of pets. The centerpiece of the office was his atrarium, filled with a garter snake, an axolotl, and a carnivorous African toad. At an explosive moment toward the end of his tenure, recalled by everyone who witnessed it, Davis spilled his reptiles onto the office's lush carpet.

When I ask Davis about this, he strikes a remorseful note. "If anyone was guilty of wild or outrageous behavior, it was me," he concedes. In the end, though, he says he never felt a part of the Etonian clique around the journal: "Ultimately you couldn't really understand these guys unless you'd taken showers with them when you were ten." He longed to go home.

IN 1987 Mike Davis returned to L.A. He took a job as a trucker again, this time for a high-end furniture company. There was no union, and wages had declined. "I felt like a sharecropper on the interstate," he says. "The industry had regressed to the conditions of the Thirties." To supplement his income, Davis picked up a few teaching positions at local colleges. He also began work on a manuscript arguing that the California gold rush was "the only successful revolution of 1848." The manuscript was lost—"that's what happens when you move too much"—and he ended up writing *City of Quartz* instead.

The idea for *City of Quartz* had been germinating for years. "I had this daydream of Walter Benjamin finally coming to L.A. and sitting in a bar with Fernand Braudel and Friedrich Engels. They decide to write a book about L.A. and divide it into three projects. Benjamin is going to get at all the complex and lucid fragments about power and memory. Braudel will explore its natural history, the larger world-historical forces that made it possible. And Engels will report on L.A.'s working classes." *City of Quartz* was to be the first volume in this "imaginary trilogy." The title came from a poem written by Davis's old SDS comrade Todd Gitlin, who "compared political struggle to quartz, hard and sharp. I thought it applied better to L.A., because it implied something that looks like diamond but is really cheap, translucent but nothing can be seen in it."

City of Quartz began by looking at Los Angeles "from the ruins of its alternative future"—the community of Llano del Río, a turn-of-the-century socialist commune in the Mojave Desert. Davis did not seriously entertain the idea that Llano del Río represented a plausible future. If anything, his choice of this short-lived experiment made contemporary L.A. seem an all but foregone conclusion. But the conceit held up an unforgiving mirror to the behemoth that L.A. had become: a "carceral city" of swelling black and immigrant poverty, prisons filled to capacity, and capitalist mansions defended by sinister new forms of public and private security.

Since the early Eighties, urban geographers with an interest in L.A.'s emergence as a center of international capital and immigration had been mapping these divisions. Indeed, there arose a whole school of radical L.A. geography, one of whose members likened the city to Jorge Luis Borges's Aleph, "a limitless space of simultaneity and paradox, impossible to describe in less than extraordinary language." The L.A. School's edge was blunted, however, by its never less than cryptic prose, which only planners and poststructuralists could untangle. Much of what Davis did was translate these approaches into vibrant English and infuse them with reportorial flair and a sense of throbbing immediacy.

Indeed, at a time when many leftist writers were embroiled in increasingly arcane debates about the nature of postmodernism, Davis's hard-nosed treat-

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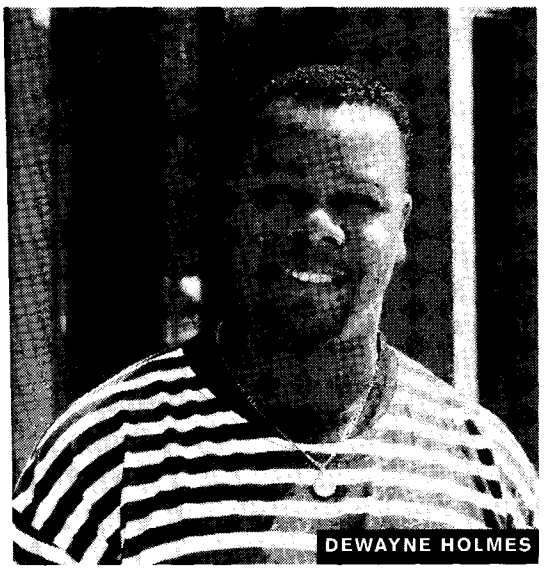
DEWAYNE HOLMES

IN THE EARLY NINETIES, DAVIS CAME TO REASSESS HIS HARSH VIEW OF THE GANGS AS HE BEFRIENDED A CRIP LEADER NAMED DEWAYNE HOLMES.

ment of gang warfare, police brutality, NIMBY protests, and the machinations of real-estate moguls satisfied a craving on the left for reportage grounded in a sense of lived reality. As urban theorist Marshall Berman put it in his *Nation* review, *City of Quartz* was "Marxist in a refreshingly archaic way." Moreover, the Dantean portrait Davis drew of the city was calculated to resonate beyond its sprawling borders. Just as Llano del Río was a stand-in for collectivist yearnings, so L.A. was a metaphor for all that had gone wrong in urban America since the disintegration of the Great Society. Of course, Davis's take on L.A. was not wholly original. In 1946 his hero, the Southern California chronicler Carey McWilliams, had sorrowfully described L.A. as an "archipelago of social and ethnic islands, economically interrelated but culturally disparate." But a quarter century after the defeat of segregation, Davis's frank discussion of "spatial apartheid" spoke with eloquent directness to the gnawing sense among his readers that class and racial cleavages had widened, that shared public space was disappearing, and that inner cities were becoming cauldrons of discontent. "*City of Quartz* fed into a kind of left-liberal guilt, because Mike was saying a lot of things that people felt but were afraid to say," explains UCLA's Ed Soja.

Davis further distinguished himself from his fellow geographers by writing compellingly about California noir novels and films, rap and avant-garde jazz, and, most memorably, architecture. He contended that L.A.'s trendiest postmodern edifices were high-security fortresses—their aesthetic performing the same bullying function as the ubiquitous ARMED RESPONSE signs on Brentwood lawns. What's more, he heaped scorn on the work of Frank Gehry, the most outspokenly left-wing of local architects and a

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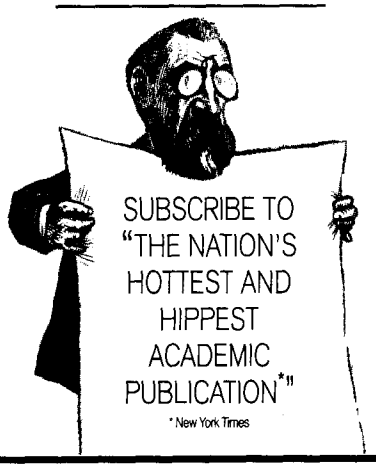

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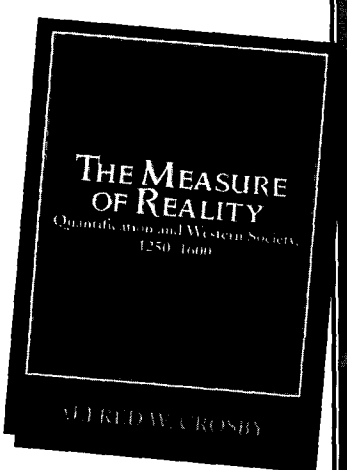

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fellow son of working-class parents. Gehry's Goldwyn Library in Spanish Hollywood, "is undoubtedly the most menacing library ever built," Davis wrote. "With its fifteen-foot security walls of stucco-covered concrete block, its anti-graffiti barricades covered in ceramic tiles, the Goldwyn Library...projects the same kind of macho exaggeration as Dirty Harry's .44 Magnum." Ironically, Davis's audacious theory of architecture as class-warfare-by-other-means made waves in an art world that had embraced Gehry's own, very different brand of swagger. Since *City of Quartz*, Davis has participated in Documenta, written regularly for the SoHo quarterly *Grand Street*, and become the main attraction, along with Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, of Voyager's Radical Urban Theory Web site.

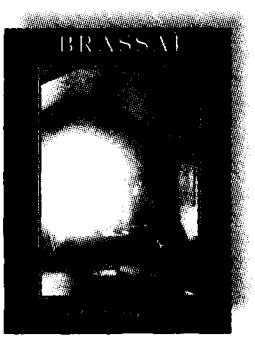
CITY OF *Quartz* received scant criticism—too little, says Davis. According to Ed Soja, Davis's geographer peers felt cowed by his access to blue-collar life and his activist credentials. "Mike was able to kind of tweak this longing, this envy among university academics, who often feel they inhabit an iron cage," Soja tells me. "His image was so attractive it made criticism of the book seem unappealing."

But Davis's Marxist-noir vision of L.A. did find some detractors. Joel Kotkin, a leading L.A. booster at Pepperdine's business school and author of *Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Family Determine Success in the New Global Economy*, has lambasted Davis as "the poster boy for a New York left that hates Los Angeles." In his view, Davis's despairing opinion of L.A.'s prospects was all wrong: "Davis should go to Detroit, where he'd really have something to write about." Similarly, in a *New York Times* review of *City of Quartz* titled, "If This Is Hell, Why Is It So Popular?" historian Bryce Nelson noted that many of the "millions of newcomers to Los Angeles...are even glad that they moved there." For all his praise, Marshall Berman closed his *Nation* review with a cautionary note, reminding Davis that "radical jeremiads against L.A....have always been incorporated into the city's official mythology."

So it was with Davis. Even though *City of Quartz* explicitly distanced itself from dystopian visions that "glamorize the very reality they would deconstruct," the city's culture industry devoured it nonetheless. It was avidly read—or perhaps misread—by people indifferent to his political vision. He was invited to speak at luncheons before rich old ladies; he was courted by the union-busting *L.A. Times*. He felt "foisted on his petard." Yet the astounding thing is not that it happened but that Davis was surprised it did. He either underestimated what he called the "city myth," or overestimated the lone writer's ability to resist it, or some combination of the two. Whatever the case, Davis attempted to nip his stardom in the bud—often in ways that, ironically, caused it to flower. He became notorious for not showing up at speaking appointments and engaged in antics that fed into his bad boy reputation. One colleague sighs, "Mike's like the child in whom you take the most pride but despair of ever doing the normal thing. As he's grown more successful, his need to be at the margins has increased, and the only way to do that is through these weird acts of disappearance."

BUT DAVIS DID not vanish. He merely sought different company. He strengthened his ties to a network of L.A. labor activists, from Maria Elena Durazo of Local 11, the hotel workers' union, to Eric Mann of the Labor-Community Strategy Center. He met with black and Latino writers like Lynell George and

The Art of Autobiography



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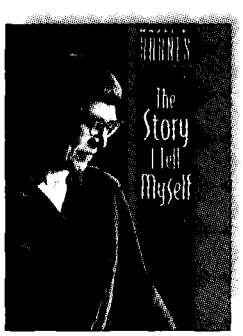

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JOEL KOTKIN

JOEL KOTKIN LAMBASTES DAVIS AS "THE POSTER BOY FOR A NEW YORK LEFT THAT HATES LOS ANGELES."

Ernesto Martinez and cultivated them as authors for the Haymarket Series. And, most controversially, he became a mentor to young gang members.

Even though *City of Quartz* featured a scorching critique of the LAPD's campaign against "L.A.'s Viet Cong," the book ultimately came down hard on the Crips and the Bloods. Davis excoriated the gangs as pitiless ghetto Reaganites, "the modern analogues to the 'gunpowder states' of West Africa." In the early Nineties, Davis came to reassess his harsh view of the gangs as he befriended a Crip leader named Dewayne Holmes, the son of Davis's friend Theresa Allison, a South Central activist. Meeting Holmes in 1991, Davis was immediately struck by "the qualities that established him as a leader at a very young age—his modesty and sweetness." At the time, the twenty-four-year-old Crip was cobbling together a truce with the Bloods in the Imperial Courts project. Before long, Davis took on the role of informal adviser to Holmes and his peers. "Mike helped us to contextualize our struggle, to get at the underlying problems and causes of crime and poverty," Holmes explained to me. Around the same time, a group of Crips and Bloods started to wage what Davis has praised as a "lonely crusade to make jobs—and not more cops—the central issue in local politics." Three days before the Rodney King verdict, Dewayne Holmes sealed a historic truce with the Bloods.

Since then, no cause has touched Davis more profoundly than the peace process. He has become a passionate advocate for California Senate Bill 980, which would authorize a Peace Process Task Force to oversee gang truces. Leading the effort is none other than Dewayne Holmes, who now works as a staffer in Tom Hayden's office. The bill has a groundswell of support, since the truces are widely credited with reducing violence. As Davis exclaims to me one evening, "Senate Bill 980 is one of the most progressive things to come along in a while. These gangs need positive reinforcement and recognition for their efforts."

Joel Kotkin sees romantic illusions about the *lumpenproletariat* in Davis's association with the gangs. "I don't see the gangs as junior revolutionaries, and the city should have zero tolerance for them," Kotkin says. Davis's writing on gangs has not always been temperate. In a buoyant appraisal of the gangs' proposal to rebuild L.A. in *NLR*, Davis wrote of

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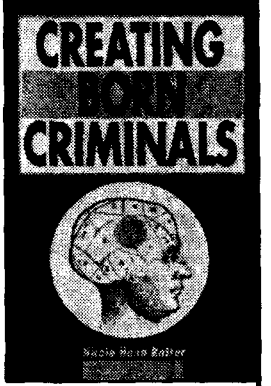

While *The Bell Curve* and other recent books have stopped short of making eugenic recommendations, their contentions point toward eugenic conclusions, and people familiar with the history of eugenics can hear in them its echoes. We need to know how eugenic reasoning worked in the past to be warned of the dangers posed by it in the future.

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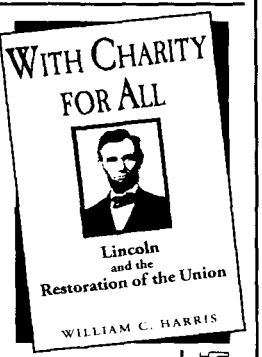

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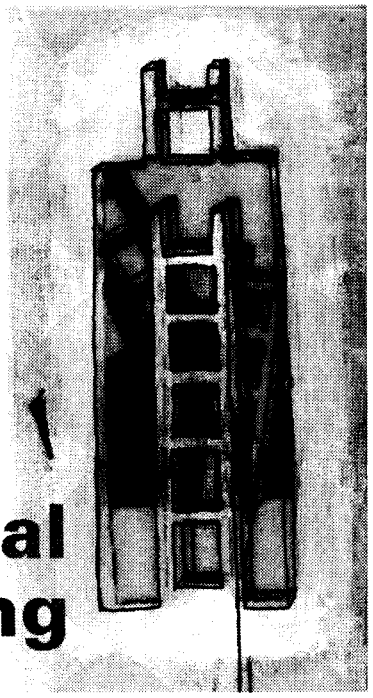

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the truce leaders as "social democrats." I ask him whether some of them were also in the business of selling crack. Yes, he says, but that isn't the important point. "What people on the outside don't grasp is that the kids involved understand their circumstances better than anyone else. What they're saying is we can produce a truce, but we can't do anything about the crack economy until you provide jobs and alternative economic resources."

It was a bit strange to hear Davis defending the wisdom of gang members. A few hours earlier, he had spoken poignantly of his growing doubts about revolutionary violence and of his turn toward feminism. "As I became a parent, I started to think about the masculinization of revolution, and I started to think that the position that socialism has to take instead is that of mothers. Too much of the history of revolutions has been the calculations of young men and a failure to understand the consequences of this for women and children." Now, a few hours later, he seemed to side with the gangs—or had these angry young men assumed the position of the mother by exchanging their guns for the olive branch?

PERHAPS Davis was expressing a war correspondent's weariness. Despite his anxieties about public exposure, he had been thrust into the spotlight by the April 1992 riots, which starkly confirmed *City of Quartz*'s vision of a "whole generation...being shunted toward some impossible Armageddon." The man who had predicted the upheaval seemed, after all, like the ideal person to explain it. And for a while, he did just that in the pages of *The Nation* and *NLR*. The riots, he argued, were a "referendum on the fate of American big cities," a raw protest against federal disinvestment, welfare cuts, and deteriorating services. He had a contract for a book on the riots, a neighborhood-by-neighborhood account that would reveal the complexity of this first multiracial uprising. Then, one day, he decided he could not write it.

In part, Davis felt that members of the community, rather than a white intellectual, should tell their story. And yet he had deeper reasons for abandoning the project. Davis had entered the lives of his subjects, and the idea of being the outside world's informant agonized him. "I knew Georgiana Williams, whose son Damon almost killed Reginald Denny," Davis tells me. "I knew their whole story, and I think I had a very powerful concept for a book that would have been a best-seller in the hands of a Jonathan Kozol. But mentally I couldn't handle it, I was too close. And I was ultimately just sickened by dead teenagers in L.A. I didn't want to live with it twenty-four hours a day." As teenage corpses piled up on television screens, providing a freakishly morbid frisson in people's living rooms, Davis grew wary of "documentary intrusion into people's suffering." He recalls: "I was sitting in Dublin one New Year's Eve watching the Sky Channel, when suddenly this image comes up: It's the LAPD chasing kids in Imperial Courts, where Dewayne Holmes used to live. The plight of the inner city was being turned into an electronic gladiatorial arena."

DAVIS BELIEVES THE PATHS OF GLOBAL AND GALACTIC HISTORY MAY BE DUE TO CROSS IN THE FUTURE.

Urban blight has become, furthermore, an almost mundane spectacle rather than a premonition of future riots. L.A.'s power brokers—and a number of its citizens—are in a happier frame of mind than they were five years ago. After all, the economy has been on the rebound since the devastating 1990–1992 recession. The aerospace industry has ceased to shrink, and light manufacturing and film have created some new jobs. The city has twice elected Richard Riordan, a Republican multimillionaire, as mayor, most recently against a progressive challenger, Tom Hayden. On April 12 of this year, *The Economist* ran an article under the headline A LITTLE MORE LIKE ANGELS, saluting Riordan's victory and portraying Angelenos as "eager for another round of vigorous growth." According to Joel Kotkin, who is riding the wave of the recovery story, Davis has been upstaged. "Mike's fortunes rise and fall with how widely accepted the catastrophic view of L.A. is. During the Depression, Stalin looked very attractive. After the war recovery, he did not. Mike can't make or break L.A. But, frankly, if we lost all our left-wing social scientists, our growth rate would increase by 5 percent."

Davis is not about to give up catastrophism because of today's hype, however. Voter turnout in the last mayoral election plummeted to 20 percent, a historic low; youth unemployment in South Central stands at 30 percent; and the prisons are running, Davis quips, "on automatic pilot." It's a matter of time, he says, before "we see a huge new explosion of poverty," and probably worse.

BUT THE greatest dangers, according to Davis's new work, are the ones coming from nature. *The Ecology of Fear* was inspired by the floods, fires, and earthquakes of 1992–1994. "I found something I was far happier doing," he explains, "because I was so exhausted from writing despairing things about L.A." This shift in mood is mirrored, sometimes alarmingly, in the book. It is not always clear whether the catastrophist is writing to avoid or to greet tomorrow's natural disasters.

With its elegiac protest against the frenzy of free-market development, *The Ecology of Fear* at times resembles a green sequel to *City of Quartz*. In one chapter, "How Eden Lost Its Garden," Davis looks back on the defeated report of the Citizens' Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches, which proposed to protect floodplains and hillsides from real-estate speculation and to expand recreational facilities in working-class urban neighborhoods. According to Davis, the 1930 report is "a window into a lost future." Just at the moment when a "vigorous social democracy of beaches and playgrounds" might have bloomed, Southern California governments allowed cities to fall into disrepair while lavishly subsidizing private, affluent "firebelts"—Davis's term for suburban communities knowingly established in wildfire corridors. By allowing real-estate interests and homeowners to call the shots, Southern California "has reaped flood, fire and earthquake tragedies that were as avoidable, and unnatural, as the beating of Rodney King and the ensuing explosion in the streets." According to Davis, there's a clear solution: End all further development, and create a green city.

Yet there's a twist. Southern California, Davis argues, lacks the stable ecosystem

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that many environmentalists take for granted. He conjures up a "revolutionary, not a reformist landscape," one where floods, droughts, and other disasters are the "ordinary agents" of landscape and climatic change. "One of the points I'm trying to make in the book," he tells me, "is that Southern California was urbanized in one of the most anomalously benign periods in the last five thousand years." How much time do we have before the next round of disasters reduces the L.A. lifestyle to ruins? "You could get fifty or one hundred more years, but very few seismologists believe this will continue."

Davis, long an enthusiastic reader of natural history, has emerged as a committed partisan of scientific neo-catastrophism. This increasingly influential school of thought has dealt a powerful blow to the uniformitarian theory of gradual, continuous evolution by demonstrating that extreme, sudden events may spark spectacular shifts in both geological and natural history. The opening salvo against uniformitarianism was launched by theorists of plate tectonics, who saw the hand of undersea volcanoes and other violent mechanisms of change in the earth's design. But plate tectonics still retained the notion of the earth as a "closed system"—thereby inviting the more radical effort to bridge the gap between geology and astronomy. Following the lead of UC-Berkeley geologist Walter Alvarez, who discovered a hundred-mile-wide crater in the Yucatán, the so-called coherent catastrophists have suggested that asteroid impacts may be responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs as well as other cataclysms.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

What attracted Davis to neo-catastrophism? The answer, it turns out, was political. "When you look at the actual history of capitalism, it is not economic crises but wars that are truly decisive. I started to think, what would have been the consequences for historical materialism if you took seriously the idea that the Axis could have won? What kind of mode of production would have been established? Marx and Engels believed that at the end of the day force couldn't just hijack the trajectory of history. I think that it can. I think that if the Axis had won history would have been deflected into a whole set of bizarre permutations, possibly back into a period of darkness. Since I was also reading natural history and earth sciences at the time, I became especially interested in neo-catastrophism, which represents a kind of downfall of systems theory and a turn toward unique events and to radical contingency and chaos."

Given his fascination with political upheavals, it's not altogether surprising that Davis would seek their equivalents in nature. But he has gone even further. In a recent tribute to neo-catastrophism in *NLR*, he suggested that asteroids may have played an important role in the course of human history itself. Noting the claims of two Austrian scientists that biblical floods were caused by "seven large cometary fragments [that] struck the ocean nearly ten millennia ago," he mused that impact craters might be "the functional equivalents of wars and revolutions in human history." Davis's larger point was that the earth is not a closed system: Its history, and the history of its inhabitants, can only be understood in relation to that of the universe. Along with many scientists, he believes the paths of global and galactic history may be due to cross in the future—possibly with dramatic results. At times, he even seems to relish the more cinematic hypotheses of extraterrestrial collision, especially those close to home: "A 500-meter-diameter asteroid impact in the Pacific, say 1,000 kilometers off the coast of Los Angeles, could produce a tsunami *several kilometers in height.*"

Such talk may appeal to fans of disaster scenarios, but it's certain to alienate some Davis admirers. "I'm a bit puzzled by the turn to millennial catastrophism," Tariq Ali says. "I mean, the planet could, I suppose, be destroyed by asteroids, but hasn't that always been the case? Meanwhile, Mike should be studying politics and geography instead of this they'll-come-from-outer-space stuff." The remarkable balance between grassroots reporting and prophetic tropes that Davis achieved in *City of Quartz* may be sliding, like some tectonic plate, in favor of the latter.

THEN AGAIN, if L.A. does fall off the face of the earth within the next fifty years, Davis doesn't plan to be around to witness it. He wants to leave L.A. some day—and move to Butte, Montana. Once a mecca of copper mines and labor socialism, Butte is now one of the sad, hollowed-out corners of the industrial West that locals yearn to escape. But Davis, who discovered Butte with his young daughter while on a trip across the four hundred miles of the Pony Express route, dreams of retiring there. "I just love these places everyone thinks of as the armpits of the world," he says one evening. Davis then shows me a series of photographs he took recently in Montana. "The first thing you see upon entering Butte is the Socialist Hall," he says, pointing proudly to a turn-of-the-century building on a vacant street.

One could see why he was attracted to these ruins of the industrial age, but why would he want to live there? "Fontana, where I was born, is a lot like Butte," he explains. But unlike the Fontana of his childhood, socialist Butte was left to decay in peace, dodging the developers' onrushing bulldozers. The Socialist Hall might be empty, but it still offers shelter from the gathering storms of catastrophe. Some may see, in Davis's pilgrimage, a nostalgia for robust working-class cultures of the past, others an anticipation of convulsions to come. In Davis's imagination, the two have always gone hand in hand.

Adam Shatz is a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca*. His article "Browning's Version" appeared in the February 1997 issue.

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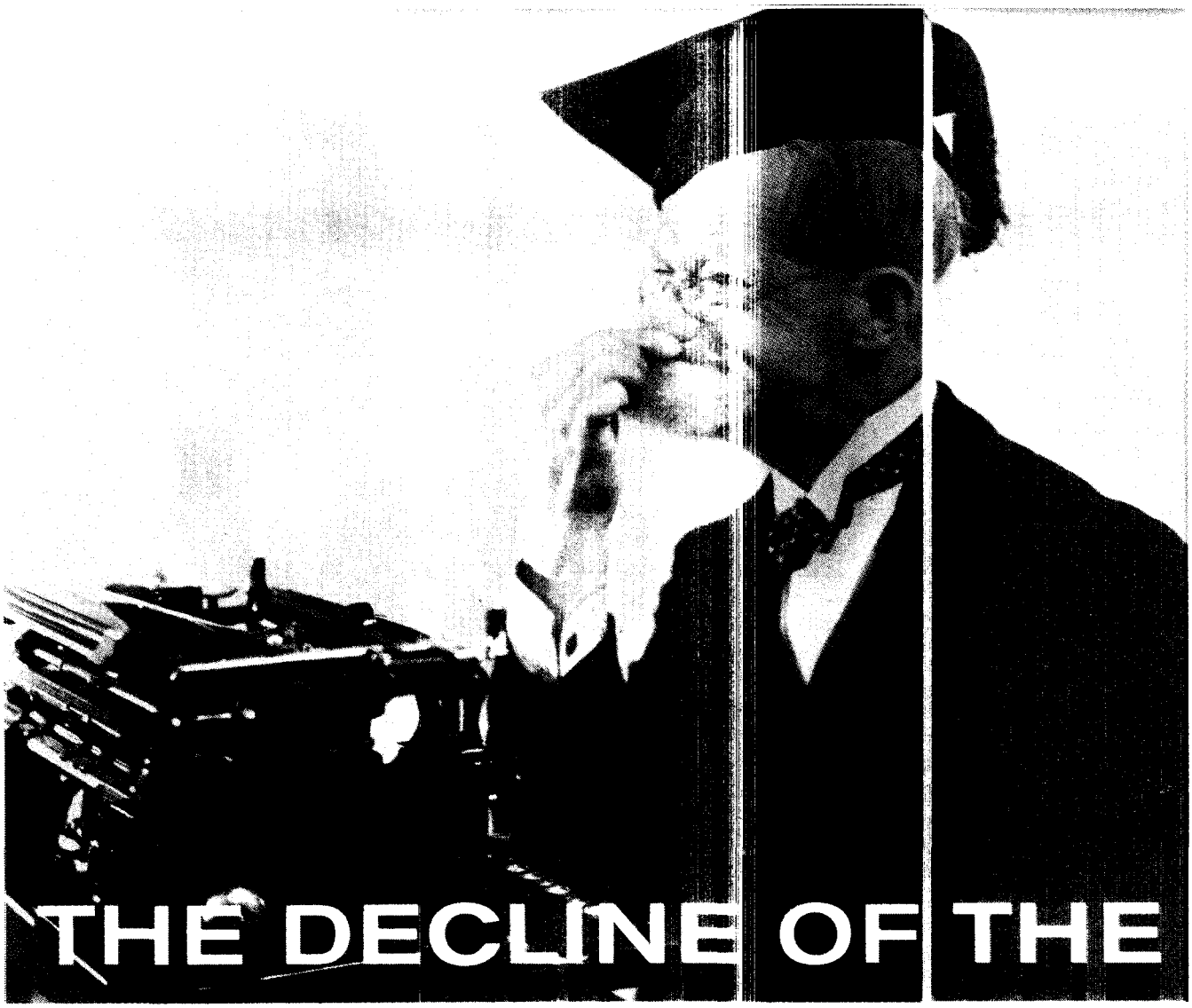

THE DECLINE OF THE CAMPUS NOVEL

Think of it as a hopeful sign that the satirical campus novel is still with us. The bad patch is over, that awful moment a half dozen years ago when the ivory tower teetered under the combined weight of bad press and public disapproval, when the heavies from the audit firm of Kimball, Sykes, D'Souza & Bloom did their best to topple it by force of sheer scorn. Though threats remain, mostly in the guise of the sinister legislator or the heartless provost brandishing the budget ax, the really scary interval—the public relations crisis—has passed. The novelist, attuned to both the mood on campus and the disposition of the lay reader, knows that it's safe now to poke a little fun.

CORBIS-BETTMANN

BY **ADAM BEGLEY**

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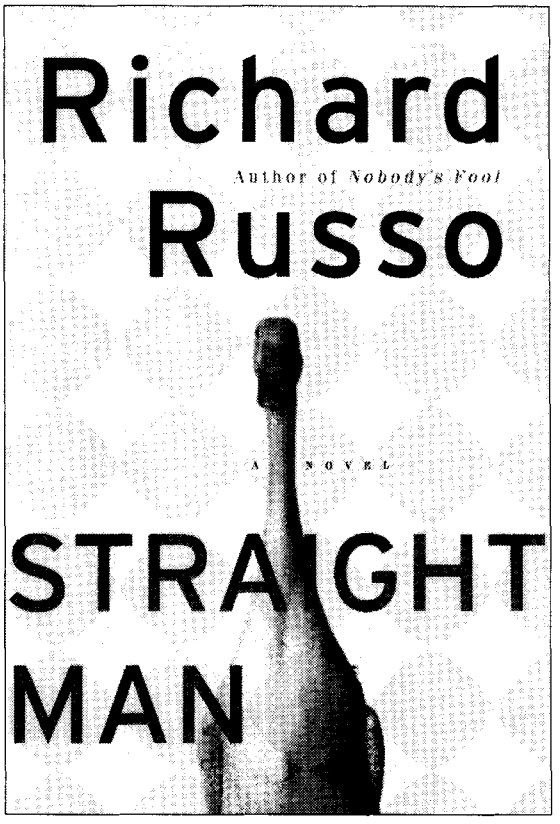
Hence, Jane Smiley's *Moo* (Ballantine), a gentle, sprawling satire (first published two years ago), and now Richard Russo's somewhat more frantic and narrow *Straight Man* (Random House). Even as they parcel out ridicule, these novels affirm the bedrock decency of university folk. Though campus denizens may be stressed, cramped in unattractive ways by budgetary constraints, their charm, their picturesque egghead absurdity, endures.

Moo and *Straight Man* are very similar, which at first seems odd (surely Russo, a well-respected "serious" novelist, would want to avoid echoing Smiley, an even better respected "serious" novelist). But then, campus novels always cover the same turf. Even when you look back more than four decades to Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952) and Randall Jarrell's *Pictures From an Institution* (1954), twinned classics of the genre, you're struck by how little has changed. The novelist's perspective shifts, but the place itself remains substantially the same. On every campus in every decade, there's the urgent need for new funds, issues of academic freedom, worries about hiring and admissions quotas, petty jealousies, endless inter- and intra-departmental squabbles. Descriptions of the scholarly temperament are amusingly constant. It seems they've been stamping out social scientists with the same cookie cutter for half a century. Ditto for English professors. The students are elemental, as unvarying as earth and fire.

The ever present, overriding question is tenure: Who will stay, who will go? The drama of inclusion and exclusion (or internment and escape) plays out against an absurdist comedy of eternal return. Students renew the cycle every year on "the day of the station wagons," as it's called in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), which begins as brilliant campus satire and winds up entirely elsewhere. In Randall Jarrell's novel, the narrator expresses amazement that undergraduates actually materialize at each summer's end: "It's always seemed the most improbable thing in the world to me that they can fly out all over the country, all over the world, climb mountains and write books and get married and—and despair and go to Liechtenstein, and then every September the fifteenth all arrive here on the hour. It's stranger than the swallows. To come back *here!*" Imagine *Waiting for Godot* strangely reversed, the faculty rooted to the spot like Vladimir and Estragon, yearning to leave, afraid to leave, and every fall, against all odds, these kids make their appearance.

But there is a difference between the campus novel of the Fifties and today's model. In the old days, the novelist typically had a greater degree of independence from the university, a critical distance. With the proliferation and expansion of writing programs, still few and tiny just after the war, the novelist has put down roots. Speculation about what the tenuring of writers has done and will do to American literature seems mostly a gassy enterprise, but one place to spot the consequences is the campus novel. The novelist is now part of the landscape, a fixture—writer in seemingly permanent residence. Smiley taught for thirteen years at Iowa State University. Russo spent three years at Penn State University, five years at Southern Illinois University, and, most recently, four years at Colby College. Will the author bite the hand that feeds, houses, insures? If Smiley and Russo constitute a trend, it's safe to say that the bite no longer breaks the skin.

In her day, Mary McCarthy dropped in on campus for visits of a "transient and picnicky character" (a phrase she fits to a young instructor); her *Groves of Academe,* a tangled faculty intrigue, is recklessly savage. Though he taught for much of his life, Randall Jarrell is nearly as nasty in *Pictures From an Institution*—he wrote with one foot out the door. His campus satire is about a lady novelist (based on Mary McCarthy) writing a vicious campus satire (*The Groves of Academe*). Both novels are about leaving campus—the action, if it doesn't involve swearing off academic life, leads at least to exodus from a specific college. The reverse is true of Smiley's *Moo* and Russo's *Straight Man;* these novels are about staying, looking on the bright side, laughing off misgivings, learning tolerance and accommodation.



Welcome to the era of the kinder, gentler campus satire.

STRAIGHT MAN looks at first like a bitter assault on university life. On the first page of chapter one, when an English professor driving a car makes a remark about the mechanics of his automobile, his voice sounds "academic, helpless." In that apposition is the short version of the novel. The long version runs to nearly four hundred pages, hurtling over a steeplechase plot, with unscheduled trips to jail and the hospital for its bounced and battered narrator-hero, William Henry Devereaux Jr. Hank Devereaux is the interim chair of the English department at West Central Pennsylvania University, where being promoted "was a little bit like being proclaimed the winner of a shit-eating contest."

The prospect of a 20 percent budget cut, threatened by a stingy state legislature, has roiled the campus. Even tenured ranks are at risk. Hank is being harassed by colleagues who think he's been asked to draw up a list of expendable faculty. An inveterate wiseass, he can't help musing aloud, "If we ever start cutting the deadwood in our department, we're not going to want to stop at twenty percent." Anxiety

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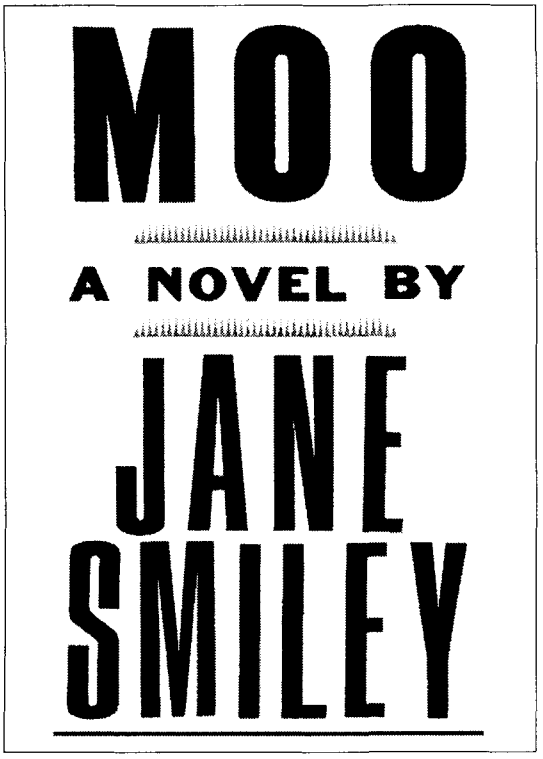
WILL THE AUTHOR BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS, HOUSES, INSURES? APPARENTLY NOT: THE NEW CAMPUS NOVELS AFFIRM THE BEDROCK DECENCY OF UNIVERSITY FOLK.



brings out the ugly in his friends and enemies, and soon Hank is facing a recall vote. Russo shows us campus politics in detail, at its turf-tending worst.

Hank's department colleagues are served up like circus freaks—strange yet familiar, ghouls from a recurring nightmare. There's the abusive drunk; the blowsy, perfumed poetess; the feminist hard at work on an article about "clitoral imagery in Emily Dickinson"; the pinched agitator for the politically correct, nicknamed Orshee because of his habit of correcting anyone who utters a masculine pronoun (Orshee teaches television sitcoms rather than "phallocentric, symbol-oriented texts"). Nostalgic for a golden age he's too skeptical to actually believe in, Hank notes that scholars no longer engage in reasoned argument; they're too busy "staking out territory and furthering agendas." These conditions obtain everywhere on campus. Hank asks how things are going over in the language department. "Silly, small, mean-spirited, lame," a Spanish professor replies. "Same as English."

Russo rags on the administration too. The "campus executive officer," or CEO, Dickie Pope, a bureaucrat at once unctuous and bland, says to Hank, "The colleges that survive the decade are going to be lean and mean. Efficient." This sparks a brief duet:

> "Efficient?" I say. "Education?"
> "You bet."
> "Higher education?"
> "Lean and mean."
> "Well, it's always been mean," I concede.
> "And it's gonna get lean. Soon."

WHEN the CEO expresses regret at the impending cuts, Hank has to admit that his "carefully calculated sincerity is almost indistinguishable from the real thing." Russo gets in a few good digs but nothing that compares with Randall Jarrell's college president and his "compromising voice"—"that voice did not sell itself to the highest bidder, it just gave itself away to everybody."

What is clever, sympathetic Hank doing in this dreadful place? A creative writing teacher who earned tenure after publishing his first and only novel twenty years ago, he knows that a move to a better institution would cost him "tenure or rank or salary, or some combination of the three." As for simply leaving the academy, going back to writing or taking up another line of work, the thought seems never to have crossed his mind. When the plot's slapstick gyrations are done, Hank tries to quit, to relinquish tenure, but can't: "True, I tendered my resignation...but the letter got lost somehow."

In the final paragraph of *Straight Man,* too many of Hank's colleagues crowd into a tiny room whose door opens inward, a metaphorical illustration of his plight: "[A]ll at once we seemed to realize how close it was in there, and just as suddenly we all wanted out.... Clearly, the only solution was for all of us to take one step backward so that the door could be pulled open. By this point a group of plumbers, a group of bricklayers, a group of hookers, a group of chimpanzees would have figured this out. But the room contained, unfortunately, a group of academics, and we couldn't quite believe what had happened to us." Hank laughs at his colleagues—warm, embracing laughter; he knows full well he is one of them.

In fact, it's in his blood. He's the son of a famous critic, sometimes referred to as "the Father of American Literary Theory," who spent his life hopping from campus to campus, always honored with the title "distinguished visiting professor." Hank thinks of his father, a haughty, preening careerist and serial philanderer (imagine an unholy blend of David Lodge's Morris Zapp and Harold Bloom), as the embodiment of an "increasingly demoralized profession." This sorry paternal example teaches Hank that "one of the deepest purposes of intellectual sophistication is to provide distance between us and our most disturbing personal truths and gnawing fears."

Is this chestnut the lesson of Russo's novel—that those who live the life of the mind are cut off from the promptings of the heart? The book splits more or less evenly, half budget-driven campus intrigue, half romantic complication. Hank suffers from a mild case of head-heart disjunction, which helps explain his attenuated relationship with a wife he professes to love without reservation. He's also half in love with his secretary. And with a colleague's daughter. "I try to tell myself it's nothing but decent affection," he waffles, "but the truth is, it doesn't feel entirely decent." Wondering what to call a state halfway between decency and indecency, he proposes "the Kingdom of Cowardice? The Fiefdom of Altruism? The Grove of Academe?" I prefer "academic, helpless."

John Irving, blurbing *Straight Man,* hails Russo's "compassion for his characters." Losers and burnouts abound, but there are no truly bad baddies in Russo's satire. Even the weak and the pathetic are

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endearing. The ax-wielding administrator, Dickie Pope, is merely small, "as diminutive as his name." Russo's compassion is hard to distinguish from kitsch as Milan Kundera memorably defined it: "the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and figurative senses of the word." If promotion at Hank's university is, as he claims, like winning "a shit-eating contest," then some alchemy has made excrement palatable.

The crucial scene in the novel, a slapstick set piece, finds Hank in front of the cameras of a local television news crew. He's wearing a fake nose and eyeglasses, holding a live goose by the neck, threatening to kill a duck a day until he gets a budget to hire adjunct staff. The goose (which he calls a duck for alliterative effect—nice touch) comes from the pond by the student center; it carries a certain symbolic weight. "There was a time when these birds migrated," Hank tells us. Now they're "year-round residents, tenured and content, squatting motionless on the bank, like abandoned decoys, subsisting on popcorn and other student junk food, too fat to fly and, as the saying goes, too ugly to love"—unless you've got loads of compassion.

IN McCARTHY'S AND JARRELL'S NOVELS, CAMPUS IS THE PROVINCE OF THE PRETENTIOUS, THE DANGEROUSLY DULL, AND THE RESOLUTELY HYPOCRITICAL.

SMILEY, TOO, evinces open-armed tolerance. Her villains are figures of fun. A professor of economics, the highest-paid faculty member, likes to refer to matriculating students as "customers." Associate vice president Robert William Brown, the equivalent of Russo's Dickie Pope, calls himself "Just Plain Brown" and glides around campus "on a smear of eternal congeniality." The university president (flanked by "right-hand and left-hand men") is such a nonentity that Smiley doesn't bother to name him. This crew has brought corporate-think into the sacred precincts of the academy. They deal only in numbers. They're shallow, greedy, hypocritical buffoons, but they're not dangerous; their stratagems are defeated with ease.

Defeated, metaphorically speaking, by Earl Butz, a snow-white hog of Volkswagen dimensions whose sole occupation is to eat. Smuggled in his infancy into an abandoned building at the center of a Midwestern campus nicknamed Moo U. for its agricultural bent, Earl is part of a faculty member's secret experiment to see just how big a Landrace boar can grow. He's a champion eater; every day his bulk improves. Symbolically speaking, Smiley's great white hog is easier to read than his cetaceous Melvillean precursor: Earl stands for the ever expanding university, its boundless appetite. He represents a hidden truth, "the secret hog at the center of the university," busy at the trough even as fiscal crises come and go.

Moo U., of course, has been told to get lean and mean. At the state capitol, the cretinous governor O.T. Early has proposed budget reallocations; $10 million must be pared from the university's budget. This prompts panicked attempts to secure alternate funding and encourages the machinations of a slimy entrepreneur (a dead ringer for Ross Perot), who will gladly underwrite research of a potentially profitable but morally dubious nature—chicken feed made of chicken by-products, mining that entails rain forest exploitation, wholesale calf cloning. The main plotline (funding lost, false funding proffered, true funding found) is eclipsed by a proliferation of romantic subplots (love lost, false love proffered, true love found).

Thanks to Smiley's deft hand at characterization, what happens matters less than the people to whom it's happening. These are individuals not types, and a reader grows anxious about individual fates. Marly Hellmich works behind the food line at the commons and watches the university file past her pushing a tray. Magnificently self-centered Tim Monahan, who teaches creative writing, warns his students that "fiction writing will lead you into a number of socially unacceptable practices." Chairman X, the unreconstructed Marxist who runs the horticulture department, conceives of campus as a "passing micro climate." Mrs. Loraine Walker, the secretary to the provost, rigidly principled and correct in the office, passionate and kinky at home with her lesbian lover, runs the university behind her boss's back. Even the students are lovingly particularized.

Perhaps Smiley took a hint from Randall Jarrell, whose mouthpiece, the unnamed narrator of *Pictures From an Institution,* declares his campus "plotless"—nothing ever happens. Jarrell's novel is ipso facto plotless; Smiley's is half plotted in a jokey, slapdash way, as if to acknowledge that drama and suspense just aren't plausible at a place like Moo U. Her novel is a lark. Witness the fate of Earl Butz, recounted in a chapter titled "A Little Deconstruction."

Budget cuts require the destruction of the disused abattoir known on campus as Old Meats, the building where Earl, who now weighs 700 pounds, is covertly housed. Liberated by the accident of demolition from his snug basement pen on a frigid winter day, Earl streaks across the snowy campus (a hog on ice) and dies at the feet of a pretty undergraduate, Keri, whose only wish is that none of her classmates ever know she served a year as Warren County Pork Queen.

Does this event signal the end of an era for the university, the end of unchecked consumption, of seemingly inexorable growth? Not quite—a fresh allocation of state funds triggers a jubilant round of new spending some two dozen pages after Earl's demise. My guess is that Smiley couldn't resist the irony of a pietà starring Earl and Keri. You can tell she's enjoying herself. And she doesn't want to spoil her good time by digging up the worst about any of her characters; she

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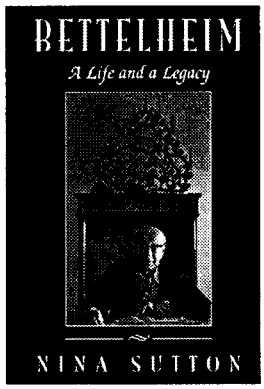

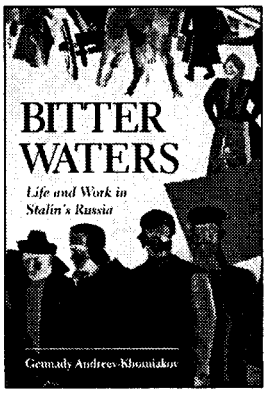

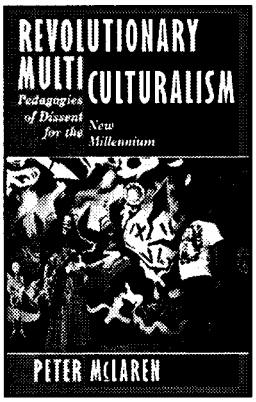

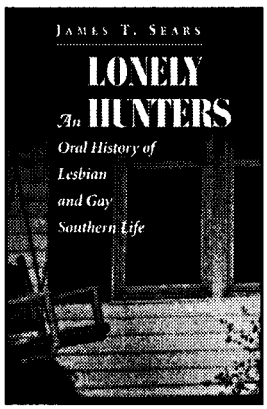

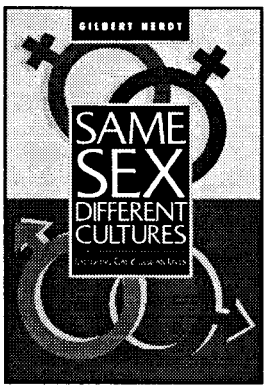

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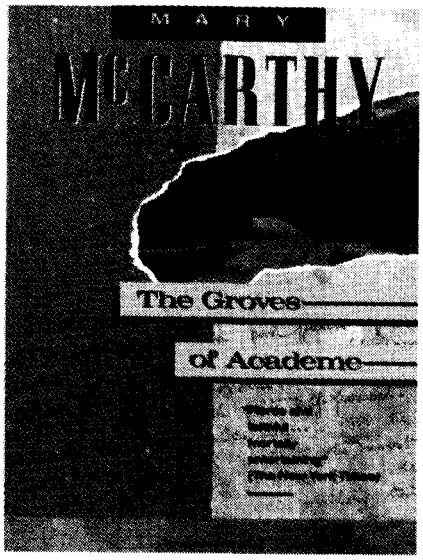
prefers to touch lightly on their peccadilloes. Mixed in with the muffled satire, *Moo* has a slightly unreal, hedonistic quality, a wishful celebration of the pleasures of university life, pleasures that should go hand in hand with security, a little money, and good company nearby.



"THERE was no end to the ways in which nice things are nicer than nasty ones"—that pearl of wisdom comes from the end of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), perhaps the funniest campus satire to come from either side of the Atlantic. Sadly, the nice things in *Lucky Jim* have nothing to do with the university. Campus is the province of the pretentious, the dangerously dull and self-absorbed, the militantly complacent, and the resolutely hypocritical. Amis's Jim Dixon is lucky mainly in that he is leaving it all behind.

McCarthy and Jarrell second the motion. In *The Groves of Academe*, McCarthy is too closely attentive to the nasty to spare a sentence for the nice. She tracks with single-minded intensity one teacher's successful struggle to stay on campus. Henry Mulcahy, a literature department instructor whose contract at Jocelyn College has not been renewed, wages a creepy, dishonest campaign to keep his job. The novel is hilarious and unremittingly brutal, Mulcahy fascinating and unremittingly awful. Though odious, he's "the cleverest man at Jocelyn and the victim...of that ferocious envy of mediocrity for excellence that is the ruling passion of all systems of jobholders."

It's hard to imagine that other "systems of jobholders" could elicit similar contempt. McCarthy's professors aren't merely helpless—they're meant to be repulsive. Would you like to take an independent study with Ivy Legendre, the theater professor who argues in a "deep, bellicose, lesbian voice"? How about a tutorial with Mr. Endicott, "the old man [who] smoked his pipe in comfort, with his hearing aid turned off"? Or Mrs. Masterson of the psychology department, "a spinsterish, anxious little widow with a high, thin voice"? Turning the tables produces no more flattering results. Would you relish teaching one of "the conventional Allysons and Pattys whose favorite book was *Winnie-the-Pooh*"? A department meeting to decide Mulcahy's fate drags on for more than thirty pages of backbiting and crossed loyalties—all true to life but also hard to bear. Is there any horror more awful than boring horror? Who would fight for a place in this dismal purgatory? The novel ends with several of the more palatable characters resolved to quit Jocelyn.

If McCarthy's novel weren't psychologically precise, deadeye accurate in its estimation of everyday human hideousness, it could be dismissed as unkind exaggeration. And even so, her attacks trigger a protective reaction that's part pity for her victims, part denial in the face of bitter truth. There are surely many ways to be adequately mean about campus life without resorting to a scorched-earth policy. And surely Jarrell, who wrote *Pictures From an Institution*

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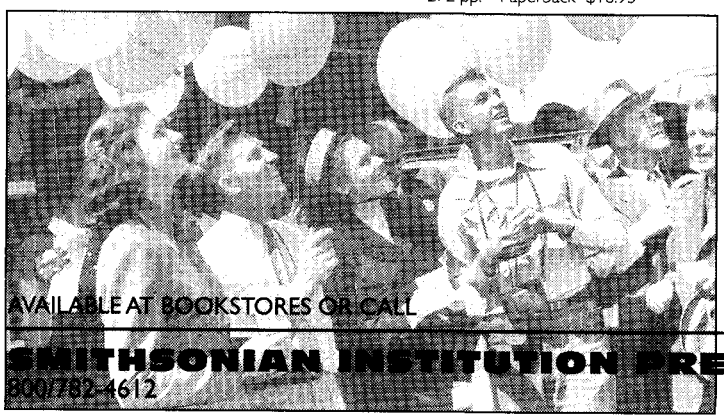
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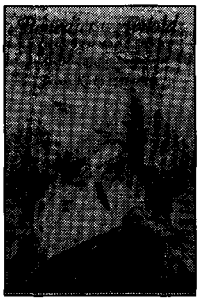

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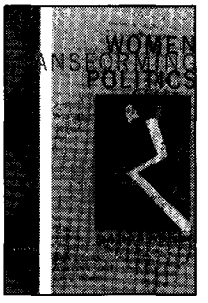

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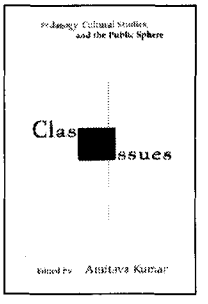

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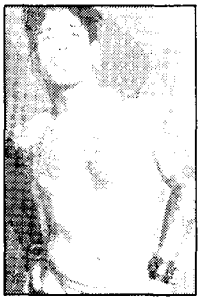

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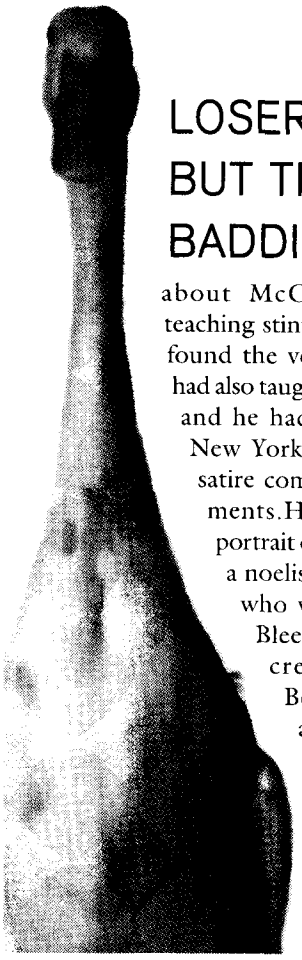

LOSERS AND BURNOUTS ABOUND, BUT THERE ARE NO TRULY BAD BADDIES IN RUSSO'S SATIRE.

about McCarthy's one-term teaching stint at Sarah Lawrence, found the very best way. Jarrell had also taught at Sarah Lawrence, and he had met McCarthy in New York. He concocted his satire combining the two elements.He paints, in acid, a portrait of Gertrude Johnson, a noelist "between novels," who ventures forth from Bleecker Street to teach creative writing at Benton College. Once arrived, she discovers a gold mine of "material" for a new book. Jarrell gets to echo Gertrude's cruel witticisms, rebuke them, and add some of his own. He gets to play a vigorous game of monkey in the middle. Sometimes the monkey is Gertrude, sometimes it's Benton.

The novelist engaged in research is a frightening spectacle: "Gertrude was never polite to anything but material: when she patted someone on the head you could be sure that the head was about to appear, smoked, in her next novel." But Jarrell manages to out-nasty her, even as he describes her nastiness: "Gertrude's bark *was* her bite; and many a bite has lain awake all night longing to be Gertrude's bark." Here's the fearsome bark in action: "When I first got here I said to myself, *How well all the animals get on together!* But then I saw they were vegetables." And here's her sharp-tongued Boswell: "Sometimes Gertrude was witty without even lying."

There are a handful of other "pictures," some of them tender, some even loving. Jarrell doesn't try to squeeze the entire college into the frame (a young woman, virtually the only student in the novel, hands in a short story about a bug that turns into a man— "It's influenced by Kafka," she shyly admits). He allows a sense of the campus to emerge from bits and pieces of a loose-jointed narrative. It's *Moo* in concentrated form, with more than a dash of pepper. Smiley's novel ends with a flurry of weddings and reconciliations; the last chapter of *Pictures From an Institution,* aptly titled "They All Go," is full of farewells and capped with the news that our narrator has resigned from Benton.

Jarrell, at one point, arranges for an instructive comparison between Gertrude and Spinoza. The latter, by his own account, "labored carefully not to mock, lament, and execrate, but to understand." Gertrude, says our narrator, "labored carefully to mock, lament, and execrate—to condemn utterly." This distinction seems an appropriate gauge for campus satires. Mary McCarthy is, of course, on the Gertrude side of the scale. She's so implacably mean that she dissipates in part the power of her wit. Over on the other side, where tolerance and compassion reign, Jane Smiley and Richard Russo are ready to understand and even forgive. Their campus, for all its quirks, is a nice neighborhood. So call it a good-neighbor policy: Smiley and Russo water down their wit with indulgent laughter. Poised in the middle, on a tightrope stretched between Gertrude and Spinoza, is Randall Jarrell, balancing delicately between execration and understanding. Where he mocks, it stings. And sometimes he refrains from mocking. It's unpopular work, in the age of Barney, recommending the nasty over the nice. And yet I can't help feeling that Russo and Smiley, by favoring the friendly, have consigned themselves to the crowded shelves of forgettable fiction. Although they're suffering some neglect, the campus satires of Amis, Jarrell, and McCarthy are still in print more than four decades later. I doubt whether the newer, more comfortable models will wear so well.

Adam Begley is a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca* and books editor of *The New York Observer*.

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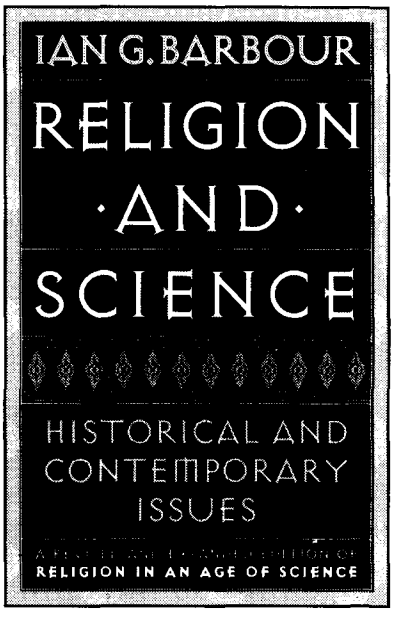

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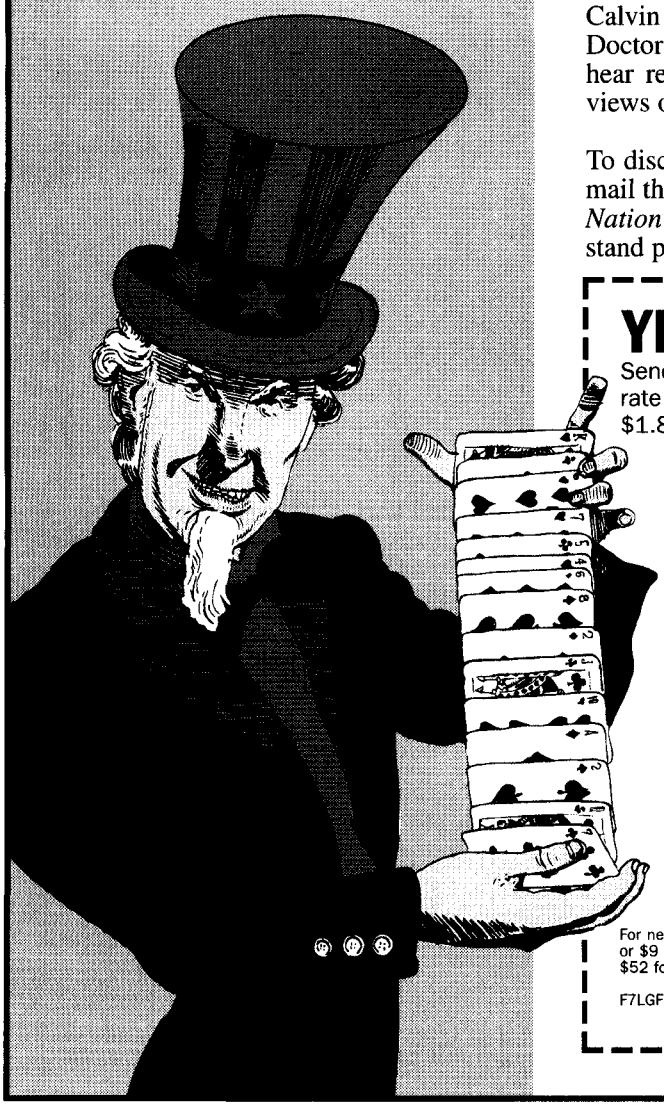

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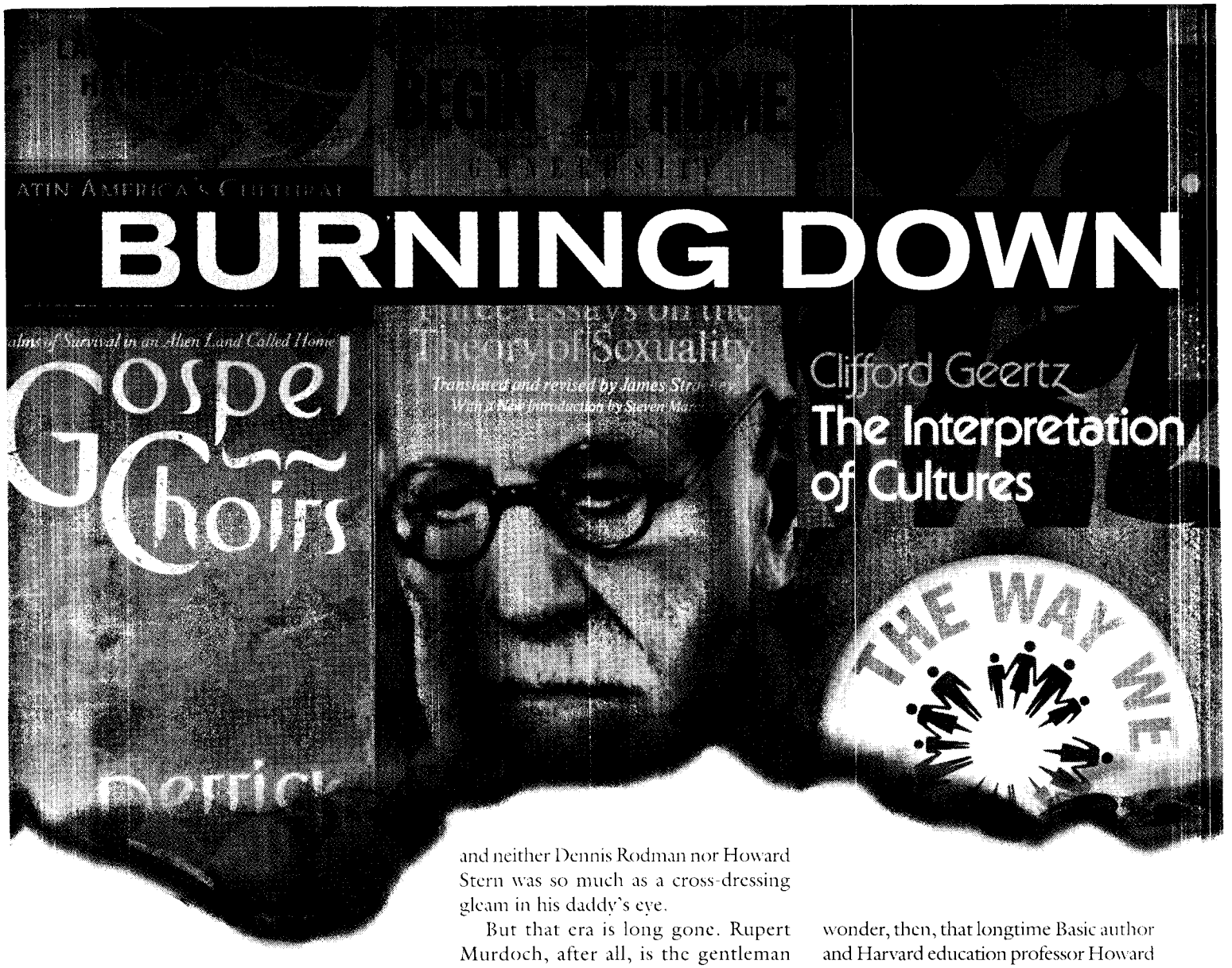

THE ACADEMIC WORLD LOST ONE OF ITS few lifelines to the general reading public this past May, when the publishing giant HarperCollins announced it was folding Basic Books into its adult trade division. The publisher's flacks insisted that the decision to envelop Basic—which will limp along as a logo slapped on the occasional smart HarperCollins title—was a routine matter of streamlining company operations in a sluggish publishing market. But for most observers of the publishing industry, the Basic "reorganization" represented much more dire news.

Even in the woozy tumult of today's publishing world, Basic had seemed a permanent touchstone. It was the sort of imprint that allowed the entire industry to feel good about itself—an operation devoted to publishing "serious nonfiction," a revealingly patrician locution that harks back to a time when most American publishers were gentlemen dilettantes and neither Dennis Rodman nor Howard Stern was so much as a cross-dressing gleam in his daddy's eye.

But that era is long gone. Rupert Murdoch, after all, is the gentleman running the show at HarperCollins. And an intellectual imprint like Basic, with few best-sellers and even fewer hopes for television spin-offs, simply didn't fit with the Australian's global blockbuster strategy. So even though Basic was consistently (if not spectacularly) profitable, HarperCollins CEO and Murdoch protégée Anthea Disney deemed it so much dead weight. As a result, five of Basic's seven acquiring editors were handed pink slips. A sixth, Paul Golob, packed his bags in July for The Free Press. As for the one remaining editor, Gail Winston, she's now just another swimmer in the HarperCollins sea—although she reportedly will acquire some books bearing the Basic nameplate.

But a mere nameplate, stamped on spines the same way that General Motors gussies up a Chevrolet with velour seats and a Buick logo, is an ignominious fate for a press whose vision of serious-yet-accessible scholarship helped define the vocation of the public intellectual. No wonder, then, that longtime Basic author and Harvard education professor Howard Gardner feels that HarperCollins has summarily destroyed "one of the great imprints in American publishing." As he puts it, "They had a jewel there and cut it off the way you would cut off a wart."

Then again, some say that this particular jewel had already been tarnished. For the past several years, the imprint feverishly tried to satisfy the Murdochian mandates of raking in profits and luring mass-market consumers, at times in ways that made longtime editors and writers cringe. Indeed, one could perversely see in Basic's demise a sort of mercy killing—if it weren't the case that the company name, however stripped of content, is being kept alive.

BASIC BOOKS was born during a decidedly more hopeful period in American publishing. In 1949, Arthur Rosenthal purchased the Basic Book Club, a 500-member psychoanalytic mail-order outfit with headquarters in the back of a

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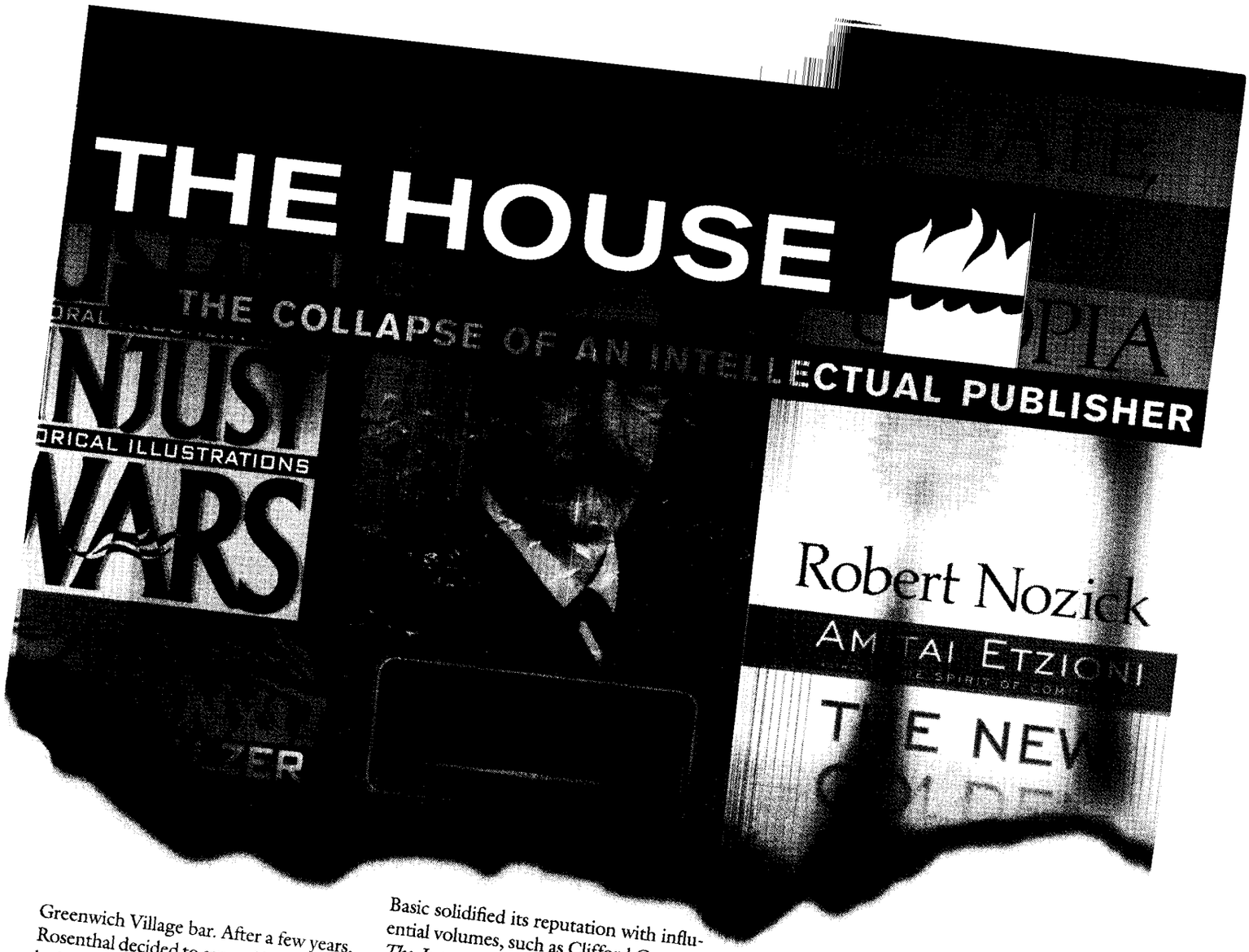

Greenwich Village bar. After a few years, Rosenthal decided to expand his business by launching an imprint. Beginning with its first breakthrough title in 1952, Ernest Jones's classic biography, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Basic helped define the market for crossover books in the social sciences, psychology, and history that appealed to both scholars and the general "educated reader." Among Basic's most celebrated contributions to American intellectual debate in the Fifties and Sixties were the work of philosopher Karl Popper and the first U.S. translations of the French structuralists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean Piaget. Even after Rosenthal sold his successful imprint to Harper & Row in 1969, it remained an independent editorial operation; the only disruption, Rosenthal recalls, was moving the office uptown. Even though Rosenthal left three years later to run Harvard University Press, Basic solidified its reputation with influential volumes, such as Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*, and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. The imprint also maintained its specialty in psychology, publishing a host of important books in object-relations theory.

Rosenthal's stalwart entrepreneurship and enthusiasm for quality nonfiction were in many ways the continuation of a tradition begun by the Bennett Cerfs and Alfred A. Knopfs, who established the genre of "serious nonfiction" through a combination of savvy marketing and intellectual risk taking. Indeed, think of any book that has significantly altered the terms of intellectual debate in the past generation, and a commercial publisher likely hovers in the background: Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*. All these titles, and scores more like them, would never have found the audiences they did without the care and feeding of serious-minded commercial houses.

All of these authors, of course, labored primarily in the academy; before finding a mass readership, most of them tended to publish in tiny intellectual journals. But that is precisely the point—the antennae of major houses were pointed upward, seeking out provocative scholarship in a way that is hard to imagine today.

Basic was one of the most successful at the crossover game. And that was due, in part, to its editors' expertise in exploiting their niche—and in signing up their authors on the cheap. "In the early days," recalls one former editor, "Basic had always been a very high-margin business. It would either pay very modest advances to writers or, in some cases, be paid by foundations based on its promises to deliver readers."

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Because their authors were offering manuscripts for practically gratis, Basic's profit percentages hovered around 15 percent—almost double the adult trade norm. This financial cushion allowed Basic's brain trust to focus on its editorial mandate, treating the house as a "sort of nonbusiness business," as one former editor puts it.

But over the long haul, Basic's success also helped secure its doom. Many of the academic experts it cultivated became celebrities in their own right and, with the help of agents, started demanding large advances and major royalty packages. By the late Eighties, Basic "found themselves paying $50,000 to $60,000 advances for titles that weren't going to sell any more than 5,000 or so copies," says a former editor. These days, high-profile academics like Marjorie Garber and Harold Bloom command advances well over $100,000—though few scholarly books sell well enough to recoup that big an investment.

Further complicating matters, small imprints must today wrestle with the buying habits of superstores. Barnes & Noble, for example, makes special note of every book that fails to sell at least 75 percent of its initial order after three months; such titles are unlikely to get ordered again. For Basic-style books, which can take months and even years to slowly accrue sales, such policies spell trouble—particularly with the demise of the independent bookseller.

As a result of such difficulties, a long-term malaise seems to have settled into the serious nonfiction market, and many publishers are feeling the pinch. This past May, Addison Wesley Longman, the Massachusetts-based educational house, closed the New York office of its adult trade division. Times Books, once the upmarket nonfiction division of the Random House empire, has been dumbed down into a list now dominated by crossword-puzzle collections. And Routledge, the signature cultural studies house that in giddy Eighties fashion adopted a Basic-like strategy of promoting academic authors such as Donna Haraway and Stanley Aronowitz, endured a massive downsizing last year—and with a new corporate parent finds itself hawking sex-advice books from Dr. Ruth. Former Basic editor Steve Fraser, now an editor at Houghton Mifflin, confesses, "In my gloomier moments, I tend to think of this as the long-term decline of a genre."

RUPERT MURDOCH

THIS industry-wide profits squeeze certainly didn't please Basic's new corporate parent—Murdoch's News Corporation, which purchased Harper & Row in 1987 and combined it with the British publisher William Collins three years later. And yet, it's hardly the case that Basic was hemorrhaging money. While receipts in recent years had fallen a bit from their Seventies heyday, the imprint still managed profits averaging 12 percent—a fine showing for a serious list.

So why wasn't HarperCollins satisfied? It's helpful to turn to Hollywood, which book publishing increasingly mimics, for a partial answer to this mystery. Just as the major movie studios have become addicted to the make-or-break $100 million film, book publishers increasingly roll the dice on celebrity-penned titles with million-dollar advances. Adam Bellow, former editorial director of The Free Press, puts it this way: "As American publishers are vertically integrated into media conglomerates, the publishing units are getting standards applied from the entertainment industry." Since just one Grisham or Limbaugh can float a press for years, the logic goes, why waste time developing books with limited potential? As Anthea Disney recently told *The New York Times,* "In all honesty, I don't want to publish books that we won't get behind and publish well."

The traditions at Basic clearly clashed with this high-stakes sensibility. With no other choice, though, the editors struggled over the past decade to learn Murdoch's game. ("They wanted only titles with big first print runs," says one former editor.) Surveying recent releases, one sees an uneasy balancing act at work: In rallying to maintain the high profit margins demanded by HarperCollins executives, Basic began pushing a grab-bag list—serious titles alongside serious fluff—that made the house vulnerable to the charge of redundancy. After all, there's not exactly a huge gulf separating Basic's recent Darwinian sex manual *Sperm Wars* and HarperCollins's *Super Sexual Orgasm.*

Granted, the imprint still produced core titles that impressively extended the reach of academic thinkers seeking a general audience: Daniel Schacter's *Searching for Memory* and Richard Dawkins's *River out of Eden,* to name just two. But the Basic catalog became increasingly focused on entertainment titles like *The Physics of Star Trek.* Written by Lawrence M. Krauss, chair of the Case Western Reserve physics department, it boasts a foreword by Stephen Hawking. It also, of course, catered to one of the most fanatically brand-conscious demographic groups in the pop culture landscape and sold more than 100,000 copies in a matter of months—the fastest breakout sales in the imprint's history. A spinoff title, *The Metaphysics of Star Trek,* appeared this past summer. (The series also spawned far less successful copycat titles, such as *The Medicine of ER* and *The Science of Jurassic Park.*) Such books upstaged titles hewing to the classic Basic formula, such as Juliet Schor's scholarly jeremiad, *The Overworked American,* Mary Lefkowitz's debunking of Afrocentrism, *Not out of Africa,* and Stephanie Coontz's antidote to family-values nostalgia, *The Way We Never Were.* Like Basic titles of old, these books steadily built respectable sales out of word of mouth and good reviews. While all made money, none sold more than 30,000 hardcover copies—hardly enough to register on Murdoch's radar screen.

Other attempts to reach mass-market nirvana proved downright embarrassing. Far and away the most ill-starred offering

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IN THE ERA OF HIGH-STAKES PUBLISHING, BASIC'S FAILURE TO LAND BLOCKBUSTERS MAY HAVE HELPED SEAL ITS FATE.

was *Deng Xiaoping: My Father,* written by the late Chinese leader's daughter, Deng Maomao. The 1995 book was a commercial and critical disaster, particularly because it fueled speculation that it was part of a Murdoch campaign to corral the Chinese market for News Corp's international cable company, STAR TV. In the end, the title—with an advance of $1 million—sold only 14,000 copies in hardcover and paperback combined.

Basic's failure to land blockbusters may have helped seal its fate—especially since its flagship company was rapidly trimming its sails in the wake of a $7 million loss in the first quarter of 1997. Over 420 employees have been fired since March. And at the same time that Anthea Disney announced the absorption of Basic, she also quietly folded the HarperReference imprint into the main adult trade division. Most controversially, HarperCollins soon after canceled thirty-six titles in its adult trade pipeline—many of which were already completed manuscripts. Another seventy books were canceled for late delivery, the sort of lapse that occurs wherever there are writers and, hence, has been traditionally tolerated by book publishers. Jettisoning these titles, of course, helps the company mop up after million-dollar bloodbaths like Jay Leno's autobiography, *Leading With My Chin.*

WHILE THE decision to absorb Basic struck many observers as rash, top editors had known for some time that they were fighting a losing battle. The only way for the imprint to maintain its high profit level was by larding the list with commercial titles—a move that further eroded the distinction between Basic and the rest of HarperCollins. This tension becomes clear in the court records for a lawsuit filed last year by former Basic president and publisher Kermit Hummel. A onetime political philosophy graduate student, Hummel is suing HarperCollins for breach of contract. His suit maintains that he was "constructively terminated"—effectively forced out of his job responsibilities—more than a year before Basic's own demise and, according to his contract, is owed benefits.

Court documents suggest that Hummel fell out of the good graces of HarperCollins's then adult trade director Jack McKeown in 1995 after he protested a round of "reorganization" that brought the total number of Basic employees down from thirty to thirteen. Hummel's suit alleges that the 1995 cuts to the Basic operation grew out of a questionable financial report prepared by HarperCollins vice president of finance and operations Robert Mancuso and presented over Hummel's head to company higherups. According to Hummel's original complaint, Mancuso's report "predicted that Basic Books would finish the fiscal year at only half of its budgeted profit level" of 12 percent. Hummel protested Mancuso's dire number crunching as a false alarm; in fact, his complaint continues, "Basic Books finished the year at 90 percent of its projected profit level," or 11 percent.

Despite Hummel's protests, restructuring continued apace. The imprint's freestanding publicity, advertising, and promotions arms were removed from Hummel's authority and placed in the HarperCollins corporate reporting structure—as was the imprint's lucrative subsidiary rights division. This move effectively sabotaged Basic's ability to market its core list. As one former editor notes, "Speaking engagements, conferences, scholarly forums are all important to the intellectual marketing of a Basic-type book." But instead, the editor claims, HarperCollins reps haplessly hawked Basic titles to "the *Today* show and *Larry King Live.*"

By April 1996, Hummel thought that Basic could only survive if it reasserted its core identity. (Critics point out that Hummel was himself responsible for some of the "more egregious" editorial lapses: He had championed both the Deng Maomao book and *Life After Johnnie Cochran,* a memoir penned by ex-wife Barbara Berry.) In a memo to McKeown, Hummel outlined his "strategic vision" for Basic's survival within HarperCollins. The memo spelled out a long-term strategy to develop a closer relationship with Westview press—the Colorado-based academic house that HarperCollins had acquired at his urging in 1995—as "a counterbalance to Basic's alignment with the general trade list at HarperCollins." In particular, Hummel suggested an alliance with Westview's marketing division, which had built up a strong direct-mail base, as a way of reaching academically minded customers.

It's far from clear that the low-profile Westview could have become the sort of Great Plains ventricle of Basic that Hummel wanted it to be. But it does seem clear that Hummel's strategy would have been one of the only feasible stabs at preserving at least a semblance of editorial and marketing independence.

In any case, his plan was not to be. The proposal was rejected, Hummel was terminated—and McKeown proceeded with plans to absorb the imprint.

REGARDLESS of the Hummel suit's ultimate outcome, its paper trail suggests that conglomerates like HarperCollins brook no deviations from the logic of the upward consolidation of ownership and the steady homogenization of product. It's not so much, as arch left-wing critics of the publishing industry are wont to suggest, that the conglomerates march in censorious lockstep, stirred by their conspiratorial mission to deprive Noam Chomsky of a mass readership. Rather, what's arresting about the Basic decision is the absence of any ideological (or even nonideological) interest in the content of the Basic list in the first place.

Certainly, the strategic vision of HarperCollins's management consulting firm, Booz, Allen & Hamilton, seems a bit thin on book savvy. More than one former Basic editor recounts the story of how a Booz, Allen consultant, steeped in the weekly sales reports from the HarperCollins backlist, looked up and noted that more publicity appearances needed to be booked for Richard Wright, who, of course, has been dead since 1960.

Even on the inside, however, the powers behind the HarperCollins throne seem to have little interest in the literary. The most powerful editor by far is Judith Regan, who has leveraged both Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern into best-selling authors.

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SINCE JUST ONE GRISHAM OR LIMBAUGH CAN FLOAT A PRESS FOR YEARS, THE LOGIC GOES, WHY WASTE TIME DEVELOPING BOOKS WITH LIMITED APPEAL?

In 1994 Regan got her own imprint; her most recent celebrity signing of note was the lefty impresario Michael Moore (*Roger & Me*), who has a six-figure advance for the follow-up to his best-selling *Downsize This!* Among the Regan titles due out this fall is *Jenny McCarthy's Diary,* which will follow fast on the heels of the Playmate-cum-MTV-personality's "new sitcom slated to be part of NBC's Nielsen-bursting 'Must-See-TV' lineup," as the Regan catalog copy coos.

Imagine this sensibility—where Michael Moore and Rush Limbaugh are run through the same filter—applied to serious scholarship. Sound absurd? That's the quandary economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett found herself in when she was informed that a project scheduled for Basic had been shuffled to Regan's desk. Hewlett, who had scored two modest successes with books on feminism and family policy for Basic, is developing a joint project with Harvard black studies professor Cornel West. Tentatively titled *The Roots of Youth Violence,* the book will chart the "destruction of the web of care" in contemporary American communities. So far, Hewlett reports, the project hasn't received a lot of attention. In fact, she and West are discussing plans to shop the title elsewhere.

"HarperCollins originally did have a burst of enthusiasm when Kermit Hummel was there," Hewlett says. "But as they let go of both their mission and their people, it's been harder to get much attention for this book." Regan "has gone into the media frenzy," Hewlett continues. "She's focused on letting her books go onto talk shows. It's not clear that she's much of a book person herself. She's really made her name as a deal maker."

It is indeed rather difficult to dope out just how any serious books—let alone a serious imprint—fit into the big picture at News Corp. In the company's 1995 annual report, Murdoch tells stockholders, "The themes that have been driving the international media market of late have centered around 'vertical integration,' 'content creation,' 'globalization' and 'convergence.'... We are determined to continue our leadership in these strategic directions."

Harvard education professor Howard Gardner, whose recent book *Extraordinary Minds* marks his eleventh title for the Basic imprint, contends that such talk reveals that News Corp has become impatient with the whole idea of remaining in the publishing industry. He says: "This is a story about people who are in a business they don't want to be in, doing something that is not only bad for business reasons but bad for all of American intellectual life." For his part, Gardner will now publish with Simon & Schuster.

THOUGH Basic hasn't survived intact at HarperCollins, it could quite possibly have survived on its own. And that may be the future of serious mainstream publishing: Rather than run to the conglomerates for cover, such imprints will need to maintain their independence—while searching for new sources of seed money. There are hopeful signs in this direction.

Peter Osnos, the former publisher of Random House's Times Books, announced the debut of his new PublicAffairs publishing house just as HarperCollins was announcing the bad news about Basic. PublicAffairs' majority investor is not a publishing giant but a venture-capital group called Perseus Capital. Proclaiming its intent to publish "books by public figures, journalists, historians, and social critics," PublicAffairs has already signed deals with PBS's *Frontline* and the Twentieth Century Fund for policy-related crossover projects.

Such curious mixed-investment strategies represent Osnos's vision of where the serious nonfiction market will have to go. "The model that's in place has to change," he says. Under the current structure of serious nonfiction deals, "we have to be more realistic about what we think we can sell. We have to sell writers in other ways than for the publisher to take all the risks," such as actively helping writers to "find new resources...through foundations and other institutions." Such talk, of course, suggests that Osnos also will be handing out smaller advances.

Osnos is not the lone innovator. Adam Bellow has embarked on a new venture with the former head of New Republic books, Peter Edidin. Their Electric Lyceum project (which is only in its incipient planning stage) will seek to develop short polemics that "mingle classic themes with modern issues" at a reduced cost; Bellow and Edidin hope to exploit the Web to generate cheap publicity and create interactive forums for readers. Kermit Hummel, now at the Maryland-based academic house Rowman & Littlefield, has inaugurated a series called American Intellectual Culture, a line of titles that will examine the "public role of intellectuals and cultural elites in this country." One of the first signings is University of Massachusetts literature professor Daphne Patai, who co-wrote *Professing Feminism,* a critical analysis of women's studies programs, for Basic; other projects are being negotiated with John Patrick Diggins and Rochelle Gurstein. University of Chicago professor Jean Bethke Elshtain—another Basic mainstay—is serving as editor for the series.

Will these smaller and strategically marketed start-ups find enough readers in the serious nonfiction market to sustain themselves? Most experts agree that the readers for Basic-style books aren't vanishing, even if the imprints that once commanded their loyalty are. Certainly the effort to escape the towering inferno of failed blockbusters and celebrity worship that is today's publishing world can inspire a certain cautious admiration.

Back in the News Corp universe, however, other, darker auguries obtrude. An onlooker at the remodeling of the office of departed Basic publishing director John Donatich reports that its new occupant bears the title of "brand developer." "No one could figure out what this person did," this Basic survivor says, laughing a bit nervously. One has the uneasy feeling that they will know soon enough.

Chris Lehmann is the editor of *Newsday's* Sunday "Currents" section. His article "Pat Churchland, Neurophilosopher," appeared in the March/April 1995 issue.

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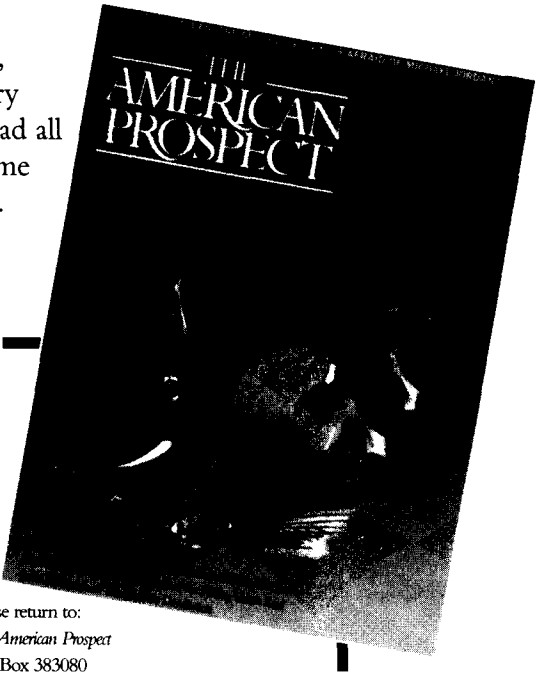

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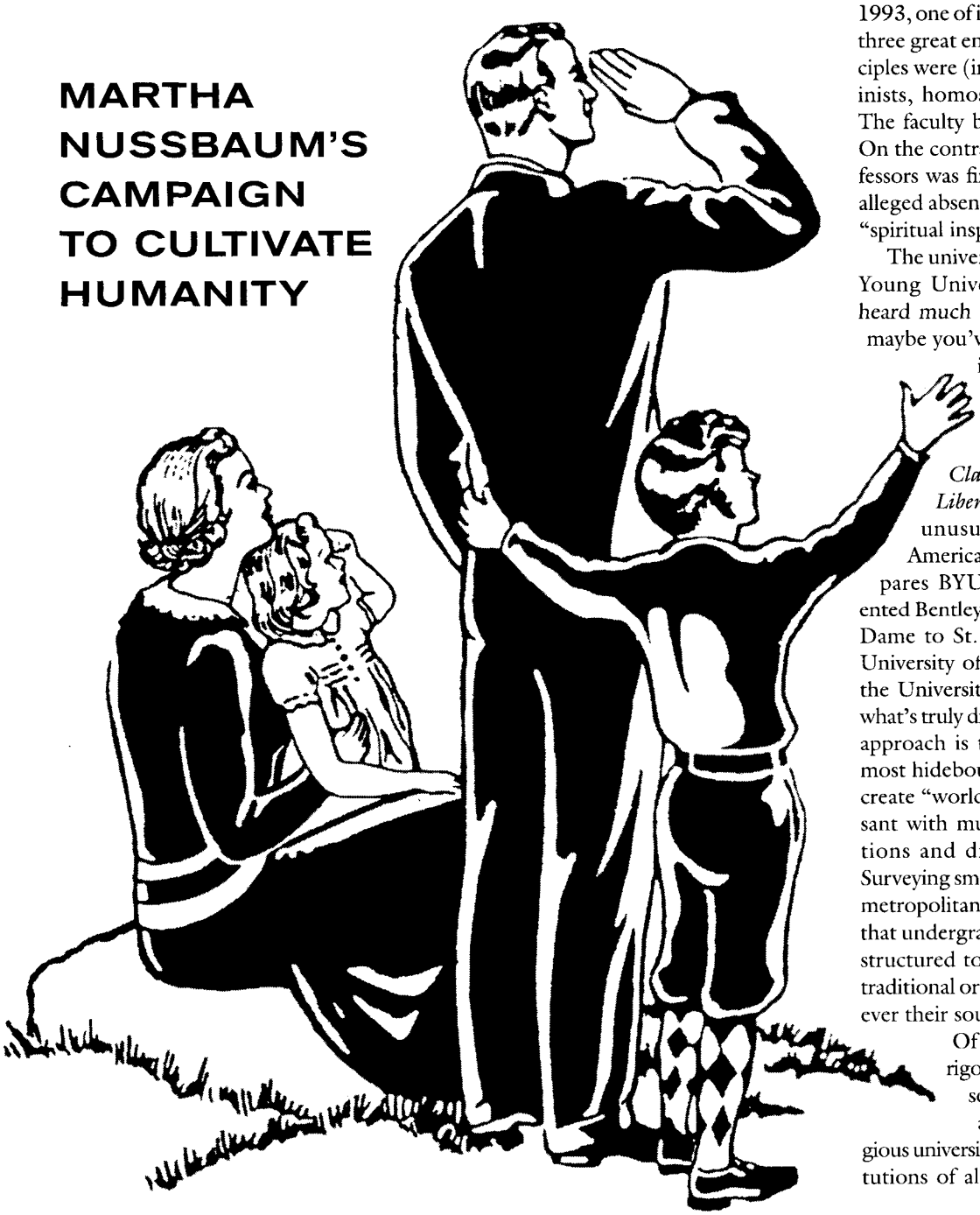
CITIZENS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

MARTHA NUSSBAUM'S CAMPAIGN TO CULTIVATE HUMANITY



THE LARGEST PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN the United States does not lie on either of the nation's coasts. Its campus is not punctuated with coffee shops, nose rings, or tufts of chin hair. In the past fifteen years, it has developed a formidable football program that occasionally vies for the national championship, but it has no party life to go with its pep rallies—no keggers, no two-for-one shot nights, no history of public drunkenness or acquaintance rape. Its graduates have traveled to every inhabited continent on the planet, but its pedagogical philosophy is anything but cosmopolitan; as recently as 1993, one of its trustees declared that the three great enemies of its founding principles were (in no particular order) feminists, homosexuals, and intellectuals. The faculty boasts no tenured radicals: On the contrary, one of its English professors was fired in 1996 because of an alleged absence of "gospel insights" and "spiritual inspiration" in her teaching.

The university in question is Brigham Young University, and if you haven't heard much about BYU recently, then maybe you've been missing something important. Apparently, Martha Nussbaum thinks so. Her new book, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard), is unusual among studies of the American university in that it compares BYU to Brown, business-oriented Bentley College to Harvard, Notre Dame to St. Lawrence University, the University of California at Riverside to the University of Nevada at Reno. But what's truly distinctive about Nussbaum's approach is that she calls on even the most hidebound of these institutions to create "world citizens" who are conversant with multiple philosophical traditions and diverse cultural practices. Surveying small Baptist colleges and large metropolitan universities, she contends that undergraduate education should be structured to lead students to question traditional or conventional beliefs, whatever their source.

Of course, the Socratic life of rigorous reasoning and constant self-examination often seems at odds with the goals of religious universities and fundamentalist institutions of all kinds. When she gets to

BY **MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ**

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Utah, Nussbaum knows she's in unfriendly territory: BYU rejects her thesis that higher education should train citizens who "trust no authority but reason itself." BYU by contrast holds that "reason must operate within limits set by revelation." As one faculty member tells Nussbaum, "The 'world citizen' is not the conception here—this is a church of apostles. The question it asks is, What people do we want representing the truth?"

One of the strengths of *Cultivating Humanity* is that it explores the conflict between authority and reason explicitly—even if it does not entirely resolve it. Nussbaum's untrammeled confidence in both the universality of reason and the diversity of human life makes hers a challenging and novel book, one that strongly endorses multicultural study while distancing itself from nearly everything typically associated with it, including postmodernism, identity politics, and the critique of philosophical universalism. Here, in other words, we have an emphatic humanist who rebukes the ethnocentrism and willful ignorance of her fellow self-described humanists ***and*** the relativism and irrationalism of her postmodernist colleagues. Who knows? If her book is read as carefully and as sympathetically as it was written, it just might give humanism a good name in the academy again. But can it convince readers who don't understand "reason" as she does? That's another question entirely.

MARTHA Nussbaum has been a singularly intriguing figure in higher education. A classicist by training, she has written on Aristotle, Hellenistic ethics, the role of luck in Greek tragedy, the therapeutic ethos of the Stoics—and, more recently, law, patriotism, sexuality, and literature. Nussbaum's own education has served her well. Her critiques of the academy's detractors are notable for favoring philosophy to polemics, substance to style: Ten years ago, she got her start as a public intellectual by questioning Allan Bloom's understanding of classical antiquity, and in *Cultivating Humanity,* she takes on Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism?* by going after Sommers's impoverished reading of John Stuart Mill. (The issue is whether one can legitimately criticize the preferences of one's fellow citizens in a democracy; Sommers mistakenly argues that democrats must honor all their compatriots' desires and, hence, that feminists are undemocratic.) Happily, Nussbaum embodies many of the intellectual ideals she espouses: This is a writer who quotes Marcus Aurelius, the Pope, the third-century Buddhist emperor Ashoka, and (of course) the African National Congress. By the time you finish the book, you've learned that she's a former professional actress; that she converted to Conservative Judaism from Episcopal Christianity; and that she knows a thing or two about music.

No one has made anything quite like the case Nussbaum mounts for curricular reform. Usually, the academic culture wars depict faculty as polarized into two major groups—in one camp, the defenders of rationalism, universalism, and classical learning; in the other, the champions of diversity, innovation, and multiculturalism. But here, Nussbaum deploys the traditionalists' values in the service of the vanguard's cause, and vice versa. In the belief that the study of human diversity will help us become more rational beings, and in the belief that reason will bring us to a deeper understanding of other cultures' traditions, Nussbaum proposes a curriculum that doesn't just add on a gender requirement or a single minority studies course but one that engages with the religious and intellectual histories of Africa, China, India, Rome, the Middle East, and even the West. "Infusing world citizenship into the curriculum is a much larger project than the designing of one or two required courses," she writes. "Its goals can and should pervade the curriculum as a whole, as multinational, minority, and gender perspectives can illuminate the teaching of many standard parts of the curriculum, from American history to economics to art history to ancient Greek literature." In this sense, the book takes direct aim at Allan Bloom's strikingly ignorant claim in *The Closing of the American Mind* that "only in the Western nations, i.e. those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way." Indeed, writes Nussbaum, "one of the errors that a diverse education can dispel is the false belief that one's own tradition is the only one that is capable of self-criticism or universal aspiration."

NO ONE HAS MADE ANYTHING QUITE LIKE THE CASE NUSSBAUM MOUNTS FOR CURRICULAR REFORM. SHE DEPLOYS THE TRADITIONALISTS' VALUES IN THE SERVICE OF THE VANGUARD'S CAUSE, AND VICE VERSA.

Of course, there are lots of ways to do cross-cultural study and, therefore, lots of opportunities to do it wrong. Attacking what she calls "descriptive chauvinism" (like, say, Allan Bloom's) as well as "descriptive romanticism" (like, say, Paul Gauguin's), Nussbaum insists that we study non-Western cultures in all their plurality rather than assuming that they are monolithically other than (and therefore worse or better than) our own. This means that the study of other cultures is never less than complex. "When we decide to teach 'Chinese values' in a course on comparative philosophy," Nussbaum asks, "what should we be studying? The Confucian tradition? The Marxist critique of that tradition? The values of contemporary Chinese femi-

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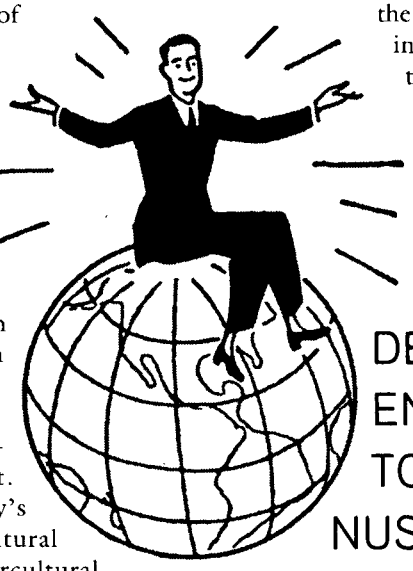
nists, who criticize both Confucianism and Marxism (often by appeal to John Stuart Mill, whose *The Subjection of Women* was translated into Chinese early in the century)?"

These are hard questions, and few American intellectuals have the expertise to answer them. What's more, even if the United States had cross-cultural intellectual expertise in abundance, there's not a lot of money available for faculty hiring or course development. Nussbaum admits as much when she gets to Nevada: "Reno, like many institutions, cannot afford to hire new faculty to create integrative courses or to free existing faculty from many of their other commitments."

Still, though faculty are scarce and funds are scarcer, Nussbaum finds much to praise in her travels from coast to coast. Together with her team of four research assistants, she attends classes, interviews professors, analyzes curricula, and serves as a visiting lecturer. Most importantly, she listens to students—like the young conservative man from Carson City, Nevada, who had to complete a writing assignment in which he adopted the voice of a gay teen coming out to his parents, and the beefy business major who's reading Plato's *Crito* in the gym when Nussbaum arrives to work out. From SUNY-Buffalo's "American Pluralism and the Search for Equality," to Scripps College's "Culture, Knowledge, and Representation," to St. Lawrence University's program called "Cultural Encounters: An Intercultural General Education" (in which faculty lived for a month in the regions they planned to study, thanks partly to grants from the Mellon Foundation), Nussbaum glimpses students engaged in careful, critical thinking about other cultures.

All in all, Nussbaum's picture of American academe is one we have rarely seen of late: Teachers are energetic and dedicated, curious and capacious, civic-minded and well-intentioned. And what a picture it would be if *all* of academe lived up to this ideal. Campuses would be brimming with engaged, versatile faculty whose enthusiasm was matched only by the energy and curiosity of their students, and, best of all, the humanities building would finally get that major face-lift it's been promised all these years. For the kind of education Nussbaum proposes would make majors like accounting and finance peripheral to the university's central mission—namely, rigorous training in the cross-cultural disciplines of the liberal arts and social sciences. African-American studies would be part of that mission, so that students might contemplate the United States' vexed history with regard to freedom and egalitarianism; women's studies would be prominent as well, on the grounds that "the effort to see women more clearly and to give a more adequate account of their lives has transformed the disciplines." Nussbaum does not stop, however, at showing how current work in African-American studies and women's studies is necessary to fill gaps in traditional scholarship (noting, for instance, that "a recent attempt to study the situation of widows in India...found that there were no data on widows' nutritional or health status because the data did not disaggregate households into their members"). More than this, she grounds her appeal in the richest soil of the Western tradition, calling on humanists to be scholars to whom nothing human is alien.



DESPITE HER ENTHUSIASM FOR TODAY'S UNIVERSITY, NUSSBAUM IS NOT SHY ABOUT FINGERING CULPRITS AND CHASTISING LAGGARDS.

YET, DESPITE her enthusiasm for the classes she visits and the curricular reforms she notes, Nussbaum is no Pollyanna. There are still plenty of things wrong with academe, and *Cultivating Humanity* is not shy about fingering culprits and chastising laggards. She is especially dismissive of postmodernism, deconstruction, and identity politics (which she lumps together and attributes generally to departments of literature). Casual readers could well be forgiven for getting the impression that the salient problem with American universities has something to do with a bunch of posties who don't believe in truth or (as if this were the same thing) "the objectivity of value judgments."

But her more powerful opponents, I think, lie elsewhere. At tiny Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, Nussbaum points out that "the greatest enemies of Socratism...are vocationalism and indifference." Since Randolph-Macon is surely not alone in this respect, Nussbaum's observation raises a number of questions. Why should American college students aspire to the condition of the critical "world citizen" in the first place? Isn't it infinitely easier to get some professional training and a chance at a good career? And why should American universities bother to expand drastically their offerings in cross-cultural studies and the humanities? Isn't the "national interest" better served by the training of patriotic citizens than by the production of millions of cosmopolitan-minded intellectuals? Last but not least: If we do sometimes require college graduates who can make their way in the world at large, do those graduates really need to be autonomous, free-thinking agents, or can they simply be missionaries (monetarist or Mormon) sent by the U.S. to develop new markets and enlighten the heathen abroad?

Nussbaum has two sets of answers to these questions, principled and pragmatic. The principled answers concern democracy and deliberative justice, and they employ that curious, noble language that universities like to invoke when the subject is the life of the mind (rather than, say, the prof-

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itability of patents)—a language that, to her credit, Nussbaum takes quite seriously. "It would be catastrophic," she writes in her book's penultimate paragraph, "to become a nation of technically competent people who have lost the ability to think critically, to examine themselves, and to respect the humanity and diversity of others.... It is therefore very urgent right now to support curricular efforts aimed at producing citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning, who can see the different and foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand, expanding their own minds and their capacity for citizenship."

MARTHA NUSSBAUM

JERRY BAUER

These sentences ring true—but will they persuade her audience? Every once in a while, I find, it's possible to convince administrators, trustees, alumni, and state representatives that universities should be places where reasoned inquiry into every aspect of the known and yet-unknown universe takes precedence over profit, patriotism, and party politics. But it's only possible every once in a while. The rest of the time you run into powerful people who think they have a vested interest in producing university graduates who will identify with U.S. national interests; you run into people who are interested in whether college students will become good employees; you even come across people who believe that unchecked reason is the enemy of sound religious instruction. Point being, if you're going to advocate educational cosmopolitanism as an ideal, you need not just a carrot but a shtick.

Nussbaum doesn't really have a shtick, but she does have some pragmatic answers to go along with her principles. These have less to do with democracy and self-examination than with how to get things done in a global village (although there is, inevitably, some overlap here): "Whether we are discussing the multinational corporation, global agricultural development, the protection of endangered species, religious toleration, the well-being of women, or simply how to run a firm efficiently, we increasingly find that we need comparative knowledge of many cultures to answer the questions we ask." Indeed we do, but there's something curious about this list: Macroeconomic interests show up here twice, in the first and last positions—or three times, if you count "global agricultural development." The pragmatic rationale for a cross-cultural curriculum seems to depend heavily on how the business community wants to do business.

Interestingly, Nussbaum's chapter titled "Citizens of the World" opens with the story of Anna, a political science major, who, upon graduation, "went into business, getting a promising job with a large firm," but who ran into trouble dealing with the cultural consequences of being reassigned to the company's "newly opened Beijing office." Anna found she had to learn about Chinese labor history, gender relations, and child-care practices if she (and her firm) were to thrive in Beijing. Nussbaum's point is that Anna's education had not equipped her to live as a world citizen, that "her imaginative capacity to enter into the lives of people of other nations had been blunted by lack of practice." No doubt this is so. But surely the challenge of creating world citizens, if you're interested in something other than bringing souls to Jesus or opening new markets, lies in convincing people that they have good reason to become world citizens even if their firms don't reassign them to the recently opened Beijing office.

One of the imperatives that drives Nussbaum's view of the world is, as she puts it, "the Kantian demand to treat humanity, wherever we encounter it, as an end and not a means." Presumably, after a few years in China, Anna learned not to take her own cultural traditions for granted, but it's unclear whether her firm regarded her education as an end or as a means. Global capitalism doesn't necessarily entail a global citizenry dedicated to relentless, free-ranging inquiry; sometimes the two can be positively antithetical—as they are in China, where multinational businesses have little sympathy for demonstrating students or organizing workers. Nussbaum does acknowledge elsewhere in the book that "if we become a population who can relate, as citizens, only on the narrow parched terrain of financial interest, we will have lost much that makes us fully human." But by not grappling explicitly with the antagonism between capitalism and cosmopolitanism (or with their complex interdependence), Nussbaum fails to mount a persuasive attack on the McWorld version of her internationalist ideal.

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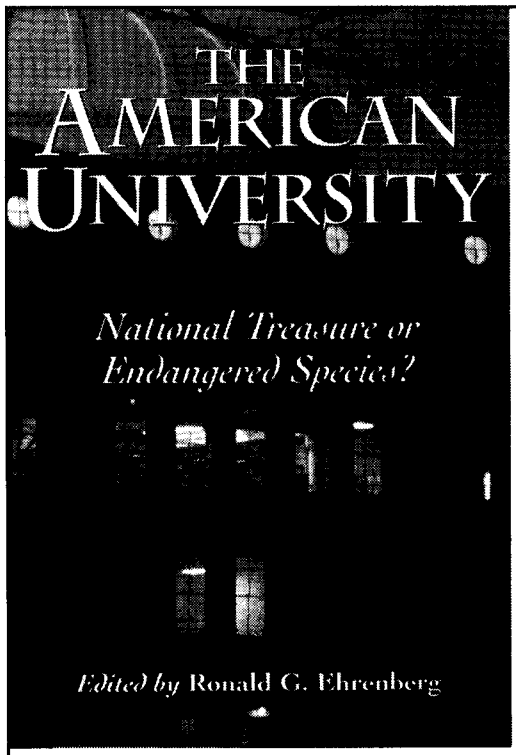
IF Nussbaum's neglect of global capitalism poses a problem for her project, so too does her blanket dismissal of postmodernism. A postmodernist like Jean-François Lyotard perceives a vast number of different ways of thinking going on in the world and believes that to bring them to "consensus"—or even to try to get them communicating reciprocally—is to do irreparable harm to the integrity of others. For Lyotard, the effort to impose one person's "reason" onto another person's way of life amounts to a kind of terror. This view is badly mistaken, I think: Try to imagine that our world is beset by *too much* communicative rationality, desperately in need of more monads and monologuists, and you'll see what I mean. And yet Lyotard's idea of the *différend,* or the nonnegotiable difference, strikes me as absolutely essential to an understanding of education and cultural conflict. If you pursue Lyotard too far, of course, you wind up unable to criticize other cultures' practices of female circumcision or widow burning; but if you don't pursue Lyotard at all, you risk succumbing to the fantasy that all disputes between "reason" and "unreason," or between different varieties of reasoning, can be mediated by a double dose of reason.

NUSSBAUM SEEKS TO DISPEL THE FALSE BELIEF THAT ONE'S OWN TRADITION IS THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF SELF-CRITICISM OR UNIVERSAL ASPIRATION.

The prospect of a nonnegotiable difference is extremely troublesome for Nussbaum, and not only because she extends her analysis of education to places like BYU. It's also a problem because she advocates the study of all forms of human sexuality on the grounds that "a liberal democracy such as ours is built on mutual respect and toleration among citizens who differ deeply about basic goals and aspirations." I couldn't agree more—but I have the funny feeling that not everyone agrees with her about what follows from the premise of "mutual respect." Disarmingly (or disingenuously), Nussbaum repeatedly asks why anyone would oppose gay and lesbian studies. "It is not clear why learning about a subject should be associated with the erosion of moral judgment on that subject," she writes, for "it is unclear why learning how different people think about sex should erode any moral judgments that are well founded."

But what counts as a "well founded" moral judgment? A belief, based on the reading of Holy Scripture, that one must hate the sin of homosexuality but love the sinner? A belief, on pragmatic secular grounds, that gay marriage will somehow undermine the foundations of heterosexual marriage? Or a belief that the state has no business regulating sex acts between consenting adults? Nussbaum notes that the study of sexuality may have some practical benefits: "As jurors, we may be asked to reach fair and impartial verdicts in cases dealing with child molestation, spousal abuse, recovered memory, rape and sexual violence, sexual harassment. We may be asked to evaluate testimony on gay parenting, on the 'homosexual panic' defense for manslaughter, on the battered-woman syndrome, on marital rape, on the relative claims of adoptive and biological parents." Certainly, our system of justice cannot thrive if our jurors are simply ignorant of the issues presented by the cases before them. But there are those among us who believe that the best way to serve as a juror in such cases is to base one's judgment less on new evidence than on old-fashioned authority, whether the authority of Scripture or the authority of legal precedent. After all, many intelligent people, from Thomas Aquinas to Oliver Wendell Holmes, have



Over the past decade, America's research universities have been accused of a variety of sins. Universities do not devote enough attention to undergraduate education, the charge goes, or they pursue unnecessary research, or they award doctoral degrees that focus too narrowly and take too long to complete. What have these institutions done to provoke such criticism and why has financial support from both public and private sectors eroded? In *The American University,* distinguished scholars and administrators address these issues and suggest ways in which research universities can respond to current and future challenges.

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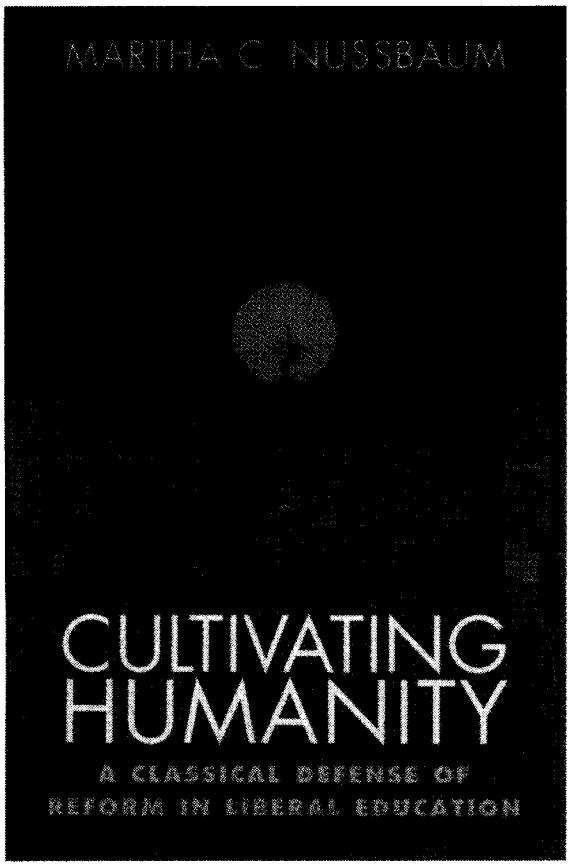

deferred to the textual authority of their forebears, at least in part because they thought this authority operated with reason.

Let me say that I hope Nussbaum's eloquent defense of gay and lesbian studies brings about a searching debate among religious and political conservatives. But I know too well—and I suspect Nussbaum does also—that the study of sexuality (among many other things) is opposed both by those who rely on faith and by those who regard their position as altogether rational. Faith, of course, is a matter for concern not only at BYU but at every Catholic university in the world, each of which has its own tentative relation to papal decrees forbidding the "promulgation" of homosexuality in the curriculum. And reason, unfortunately, is easily invoked by those who oppose not only gay studies but also antidiscrimination laws. To take a recent example, consider E.L. Pattullo's 1992 article in *Commentary*, "Straight Talk About Gays," which argues that, because society has a compelling interest in discouraging people from becoming gay, "reason suggests that we guard against doing anything which might mislead wavering children into perceiving society as indifferent to the sexual orientation they develop."

When she's faced with illiberal and inhumane sentiments like these, Nussbaum has only one card to play: What these people (Mormon trustees, say, or *Commentary* essayists) need is more reason. She concludes her report on BYU in this vein: "In the areas of gender and sexuality, dialogue, which at present is discouraged, would considerably enhance the lives of people who suffer low self-esteem and ostracism; to encourage such dialogue seems morally essential." But *to whom* does it

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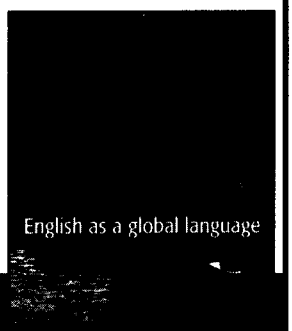

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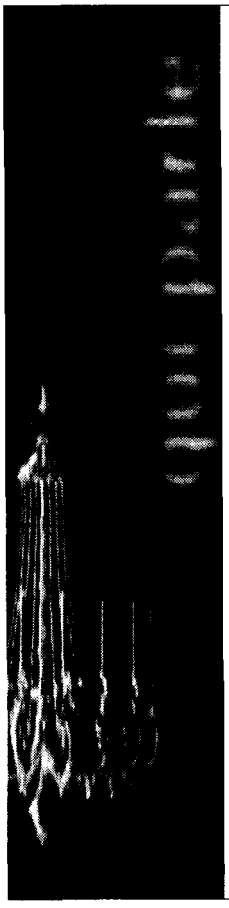
seem morally essential? Here, then, is where a skeptic of rational consensus like Lyotard is useful (even though he's more usually invoked by the academic left to protect the "language games" of disabled lesbian sex workers of color than those of *Commentary* magazine editors or elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). It is impossible, unfortunately, to appeal to reason when confronting discourse in which "reason" is understood as synonymous with "deference to established authority." It's also quite often impossible to appeal to a universal table of reason in order to rule out of court *other people's* appeals to reason when they clash with our own. As much as I yearn for a decisive criterion by which my own progressive, humanitarian principles are correct and those of my opponents are either nutty or mistaken, I have met just enough people in my travels to know that in this sublunary sphere "reason," like God, works in ways I do not always understand.

IN NUSSBAUM'S DECK OF CARDS, REASON ALWAYS TRUMPS.

Nussbaum tries to dodge these impasses by means of a kind of rhetorical jujitsu, taking her preferred elements of various religious intellectual traditions and trying to use them against each religion's worst anti-intellectual tendencies. Bypassing the Vatican's strictures on the study of homosexuality, for instance, Nussbaum quotes instead the Pope's October 1995 address to the United Nations General Assembly in which his holiness said, "To cut oneself off from the reality of difference—or, worse, to attempt to stamp out that difference—is to cut oneself off from the possibility of sounding the depths of the mystery of human life." Similarly, despite the history of friction between Catholic universities and secular ideals of academic freedom, Nussbaum claims that "Roman Catholicism is well placed theologically to establish a religious university that is both truly religious and truly a university." About BYU she has less to say in this vein, since the intellectual tradition of Mormonism is not quite so rich as that of Rome, but she does try to combat Mormon deference to church authority



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by citing the motto of BYU, "the glory of God is intelligence."

Yet Mormonism—and, for that matter, any form of Christianity that subordinates reason to revelation and insists on a literal reading of Scripture—is not about to be finessed by Nussbaum's (or my) appeals to the liberating aspects of Socratic self-examination and the humanizing effects of world citizenship. Some forms of religious belief, of course, are entirely compatible with the dictates of reason and the demands of intellectual rigor. I remember very well that, during my four years in a Jesuit high school (where I was trained in things like Latin, political philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche, groundbreaking biblical exegesis, and doctrinal history since Nicea and Chalcedon), I was impressed time and again with how my instructors in this branch of Catholicism could lead lives in which religious faith and keen intellect worked to the enhancement of each other. But the Jesuits are famous troublemakers in the intellectual history of Catholicism, partly because of their love of learning and disputation. Where my former Jesuit teachers may very likely welcome Nussbaum's critique with open arms (and many legal pads of further commentary), the leaders of other faiths, including the Mormon elders, may very likely see it as precisely the thing their faith was meant to warn them against.

I said that Nussbaum has only one card to play in this position; but then again, in Nussbaum's deck of cards, reason always trumps, and all those holdouts who don't like the rule of reason must ultimately be persuaded to reason differently—that is, similarly to us reasonable folk. Personally, I find this eminently reasonable. But I'm less sanguine about what reason can and can't do when it's confronted with political and religious opposition to gay and lesbian studies; fundamentalist Muslim clerics, evangelical Christian preachers, and even influential papal advisers (like Cardinal Ratzinger) have so far seemed unmoved by Nussbaumian appeals to our common humanity and our shared capacity for reason. It seems prudent, then, at the very least, to entertain reasonable doubts about the reach of reason. In *Cultivating Humanity,* Nussbaum tries to make the best of America's major religious traditions, tracing even the most intolerant among them back to their roots in *charitas,* agape, and the fostering of compassionate love. Hers is a canny and admirable effort, but it remains to be seen whether her ecumenical appeal to the human spirit will carry the day against ignorance, fear, identity politics, parochialism, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and—last but not least—capitalism. For secular intellectuals like me who agree that the unexamined life is not worth living, it seems only human to hope that Nussbaum's vision of higher education will guide American universities in the twenty-first century; and yet it is only reasonable, given the current composition of the human race, to fear that it will not.

Michael Bérubé is director of the Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the author most recently of *Life as We Know It: A Father, a Family, and an Exceptional Child* (Pantheon).

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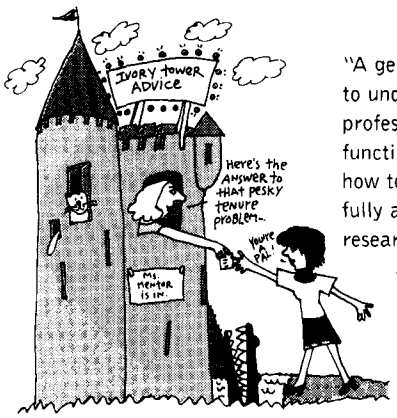

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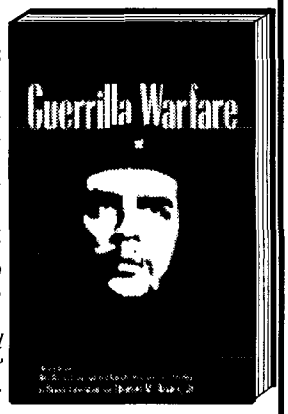

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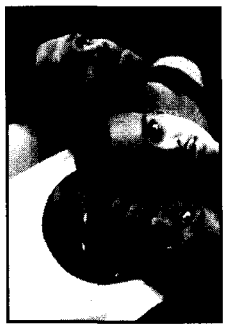

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continued from page 7

tient with affirmative action." The evidence she cites, where it is not confined to anecdote, is based on the results of anonymous mail ballots on three UC campuses. This evidence is interesting. But it needs to be treated with some care, since the mail ballots were primarily referenda on the regents and the way they handled the issue rather than on affirmative action as such.

Recent polling data, which Burdman fails to cite, shows conclusively that racial and gender preferences lack political legitimacy even inside the academy. A survey of faculty at all nine UC campuses, which was sponsored by the California Association of Scholars and designed and conducted by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research in December 1995, found a plurality of faculty favoring a policy that is virtually identical with the regents' resolutions. A similar, nationwide Roper Center survey in October 1996, which was sponsored by the National Association of Scholars, found that almost two-thirds of American professors would support a ban on preferences at their institutions similar to California's Proposition 209. (Further details on these surveys, which are arguably the least publicized findings in higher education in the last several years, are available on the Web at http://www.calscholars.org/roper.html and http://www.nas.org/roper/exsum.htm.)

THOMAS E. WOOD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

Reading Matthew Howard's piece on Borges's translator Norman Thomas di Giovanni ["Stranger Than *Ficción*," *LF*, June/July], I was struck by how many of di Giovanni's editorial corrections actually clarified and improved Borges's work. That this Spanish-language author's first literary language, so to speak, was English seems to me irrelevant to the judgment of his translator's efforts. After all, editors customarily speak the same language as the writers they edit, even if some of those writers are loath to admit it.

It might interest your readers to know that Viking USA is preparing a three-volume English edition of Borges's work. Alastair Reid and John Coleman are translating a large selection of Borges's poetry, and the nonfiction is in the capable hands of Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine. Retranslating the prose fiction, however, has proven to be a knottier business. There have been substantial problems with the early translations, and Margaret Sayers Peden has been hired to make substantial revisions. Borges fans can only hope that Peden, best known for her translations of Isabel Allende, is as good as di Giovanni was: As Viking has the exclusive world English rights, this will be the only English edition of Borges available for some time to come.

LEE SMITH
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AFTER THE SHOCK

Buried on the fourth page of James Surowiecki's profile of Jeffrey Sachs ["Dr. Shock," *LF*, July] is a telling admission that does damage not only to Sachs's shock-therapy treatment but, implicitly, to economic thought in general: In its Bolivian practice, Sachs's "program...brought about higher unemployment, wage freezes, and a sharp rise in the price of heating oil." That these results are passed off as mild discomforts whose acknowledgment won't do any real damage to the theory is a damning indication of the lousy state of economic thought. Where, oh where, are the economists whose first years out of high school were not spent visiting Europe but instead flipping burgers, shoveling horse shit, or caring for the elderly? For people with jobs such as these, reward is tied directly to the state of the economy, and unemployment, wage freezes, and higher utility bills aren't just theoretical inconveniences to be suffered by faceless proles. Equally telling is Sachs's comment that "Russia's tragedy is that no investment banker's Christmas bonus has ever depended on Russia's financial stability." The statement is rather ironic since I'm sure Sachs's own fees never rely on the selfsame proof of any country's financial stability.

R.T. BLEDSOE
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THANKS FOR NOTHING!

Having now subscribed to *Lingua Franca* for six months, I regret to say that your magazine just isn't very interesting. Your Decemeber/January 1997 issue was especially bad. The fact that you devoted a long article ("Screen Test") to the computerized GRE shows just how hard up you are for good copy. Your "Tenure and Hirings, by Discipline" is nothing but meaningless page-filler. Why don't you try something interesting, like tenured professors John Mack (Harvard) or David Jacobs (Temple) who have both written books on "alien abductions" and who argue that humans are being abducted by aliens? That's *controversial*. As an academic who reads and publishes very widely, I'm sorry to say that your magazine just isn't very arresting.

JOHN HUND
DEPT. OF AFRICAN LAW
UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH
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CORRECTION

In "Ties That Bind" [July] *Lingua Franca* erroneously reported that the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a study heralding the efficacy of Genentech's heart-attack medication, TPA. In fact, the study was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

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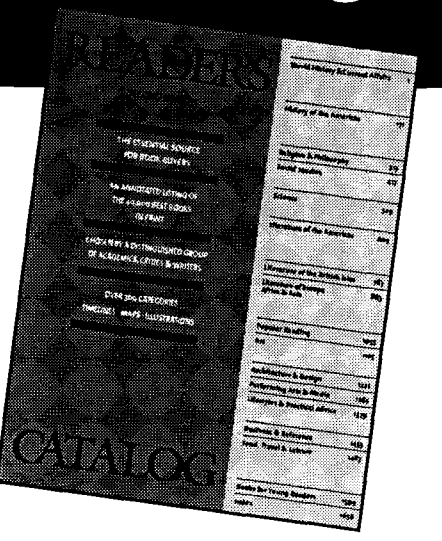

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The Association of Literary Scholars and Critics is founding a new journal and invites applications for the position of editor. The purpose of the ALSC is to foster appreciation of the literary imagination, of the value of literary studies, and of a common literary culture. It welcomes all those with a serious scholarly or critical interest in literature--classicists and modernists, independent and academic literary critics, as well as creative writers and editors. It seeks to uphold broad conceptions of literature, rather than the narrow, highly politicized ones often encountered today. Within the framework of these general principles, the editor will play a major role in determining the shape of the journal. Applicants should submit a c.v. and brief statement of their conception of the journal to: ALSC, 2039 Shattuck Ave., Suite 202, Berkeley, CA 94704-1116. Fax: 510 849 2492. Deadline: September 10.

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FELLOWSHIPS FROM CORNELL UNIVERSITY MELLON POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

Fellowships to encourage the academic g rowth of promising humanists with recent Ph.D. degrees. Fellows spend a year at Cornell teaching half-time in a department and pursuing their research. Applicants must have received the Ph.D. after September 1992, and must be citizens of the United States or Canada or hold permanent residency cards. Fields for the 1998/1999 academic year are: Asian Studies, Linguistics, Government, Art History, Philosophy, and Women's Studies. Stipend: $30,000. Deadline: January 3, 1998. For further information write: Agnes Sirrine, The Society for the Humanities, 27 East Avenue, Ithaca, NY 14853. Or call: (607) 255-9274. *Due to the winter holidays, the office will be closed between December 20 and January 5; therefore, applications will be unavailable after December 18.*

Fellowships from Cornell University The Society for the Humanities

Resident Postdoctoral Fellowships for the 1998-99 academic year. Applications must be postmarked on or before October 21, 1997. Applicants must have completed the Ph.D. by the time of application, and have one or more years of college teaching experience. Applicants must be working on topics related to this year's theme: The Virtual Old and New. Stipend: $32,000. For further information write: Agnes Sirrine, The Society for the Humanities, 27 East Avenue, Ithaca, NY 14853, (607) 255-9274.

Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship Cultural Studies Center for the Humanities Wesleyan University Middletown, CT 06459

Term: 1998/99. Themes: Discourses of Development and Progress: Global, Regional, and Local Histories (Fall), Discourses of Development and Progress: The Return of Religion (Spring). Ph.D. in hand, not earlier than May 1993. Stipend $31,000. For information, write Application Coordinator, Center for the Humanities, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06459-0069

Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis

invites applications for senior and post-doctoral fellowships from individuals engaged in research on topics related to

The Black Atlantic: Race, Nation, and Gender

In the academic year 1998-1999, the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis will enter the second year of its project on the Black Atlantic. Designed to map the comparative and international history of the modern black experience, this project welcomes applications from all disciplines and regional specializations. While individual projects need not be explicitly comparative, weekly seminars and annual conferences will explore a variety of broad themes common to the Black Atlantic world. Applicants need not be United States citizens. AA/EOE. For further information and fellowship applications, write to the project directors:

Professors Deborah Gray White and Mia Elisabeth Bay
Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis
Rutgers -- The State University of New Jersey
88 College Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901 USA

Closing date for applications for 1998-1999 fellowships is **December 15, 1997**. Those interested in giving a paper in 1998-1999 should also write to Professors White and Bay.

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New Haven, CT; September 26-27, 1997

LATINA VISIONS

"Latina Visions for Transforming the Americas/Perspectivas de la mujer latina en la transformación de las Americás," seventh annual Women's Studies conference at Southern Connecticut State University. Bilingual conference sessions across an interdisciplinary spectrum, including literature, politics, popular culture, and the visual and performing arts. Keynote presenters: Myra Santos, winner of the Juan Rufo Prize for Literature; Iris Morales, director of *Palante, Siempre Palante*; scholars Edna Acosta-Belén, Asuncion Lavrin, and Ruth Behar; folklorist-choreographer Awilda Sterling-Duprey. Performance by Sol y Canto. For registration information, contact: Vara Neverow, Women's Studies, EN271, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT 06515; phone 203-392-6133 (English) and 203-392-6754 (en Español); fax 203-392-6723; e-mail <womenstudies@scsu.ctstateu.edu>; or visit our Web site at <http://scsu.ctstateu.edu/~womenstudies/wmst.html>.

New Haven, CT; October 3-5, 1997

BOYS AND THEIR TOYS

The conference "Boys and Their [illegible] be held at the Hagley Museum [illegible] panel will consider "Masculinity [illegible] line, in the Civilian Conservation [illegible] among architects and carpenters [illegible] session "Risk and Danger" will [illegible] mobile racing. The closing panel [illegible] early-twentieth-century entertain[illegible] tools. Speakers include Steve M[illegible] Steven Gelber. For more inform[illegible] 658-2400, ext. 243; fax 302-6[illegible] the Center for the History of Bu[illegible]

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PUBLIC CULTURE(S)

The theme of the 1997 Joint Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association and the Canadian Association for American Studies, at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, is "Going Public: Defining Public Culture(s) in the Americas." More than 220 events, including plenaries, sessions, workshops, conversations, films, performances, and tours will explore questions of diversity and unity, identity and difference, in American public culture(s). For information, contact Convention Manager, American Studies Association, 1120 19th Street, NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036; e-mail <pp001366@mindspring.com>. The program book will be available online around August 1 at <http://muse.jhu.edu/associations/asa/program97>.

Washington, DC; October 30–November 2, 1997

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ADVERTISE YOUR CONFERENCE ON THIS PAGE, CALL (212) 302-0336 ext. 224 or e-mail: kornasie@linguafranca.com.

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ARGUING WITH THE RIGHT

The Center for Democratic Values, a network of academics and activists seeking to move mainstream discussion to the left, is holding its first national conference immediately preceding the Democratic Socialists of America convention. Historical and analytical sessions, plus skills workshops, will develop understandings, strategies, and skills for contesting the right's current dominance of American political discussion. The highlight of the conference will be a public left-right debate, sponsored by Capital University, on the topic "Does the American Economy Serve Democratic Values?" with Cornel West (Harvard) and Barbara Ehrenreich (*Blood Rites*) arguing from the left and David Frum (*What's Right*) and Stuart Butler (Heritage Foundation) on the right. Contact Ronald Aronson, Wayne State University, 5700 Cass Avenue, Room 2426, Detroit, MI 48202; e-mail <Raronso@cll.wayne.edu>; phone 313-577-0828; fax 313-577-8585; or visit our Web site at <http://www.igc.apc.org/cdv/>.

Columbus, OH; November 6-7, 1997

AFTER POSTMODERNISM

"If we absorb postmodernism, if we recognize the variety and ungroundedness of grounds but do not want to stop in arbitrariness, relativism, or aporia, What comes *after* postmodernism?" Topics for discussion include logic, cultures, practice and theory, phenomenology, conceptions of self and body, Wittgenstein's philosophy, and political and ethical stands. Papers for discussion are available at <http://www.focusing.org/postmod.htm>, and an e-mail discussion is now in progress. To participate in the e-mail discussion, and for free registration in the conference, please contact Eugene T. Gendlin or Richard A. Shweder, The University of Chicago, Committee on Human Development, 5730 South Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637; or send e-mail to <gend@midway.uchicago.edu>. Sponsored by the Ward M. and Mariam C. Canaday Educational Trust.

Chicago, IL; November 14-16, 1997

WEBS OF DISCOURSE

Is a comprehensive synthesis of science studies across the discursive disciplines possible? What roles will the Web and other interactive technologies play? The thirty-first annual Texas Tech University comparative literature symposium, "Webs of Discourse: The Intertextuality of Science Studies," invites discussion of these and related issues by scholars working in any area of cultural science studies, as well as by rhetoricians, critical theorists, and literature studies scholars. Plenary speakers are Donna Haraway, Lynn Randolph, Marcos Novak, and Carl Rubino. For more information, visit our Web site at <http://www.english.ttu.edu/wod/>. Send one-to-two page abstracts by September 30, 1997, through forms available on the Web site, by e-mail, <bruno@ttu.edu>, or to Bruce Clarke, Department of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091.

Lubbock, TX; February 5-7, 1998

WOMEN'S HISTORY

The Women's History Faculty at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, invites proposals to reexamine existing paradigms and explore emerging ones in the field at a conference to be held in New York City. To ensure a wide array of current scholarship, established scholars are urged to apply in pairs with a graduate student or recent Ph.D. Graduate students and junior faculty are encouraged to apply individually if necessary. Instead of panels where papers are read and criticized, the format will be working seminars where the presenters discuss new issues and methodologies that have arisen in the field of women's history in the 1990s. The focus will be on recent scholarship and how it has changed previous conceptions or given rise to new concerns. We are especially interested in approaches that question accepted temporal and national historical divisions. Proposals should be sent to the Ph.D. Program in History, City University of New York Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036, Attn.: Bonnie S. Anderson, by December 31, 1997.

New York, NY; October 9-10, 1998

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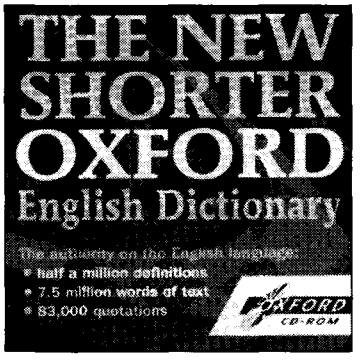

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